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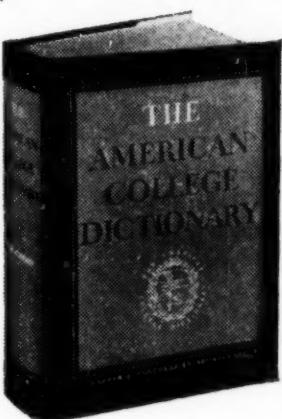
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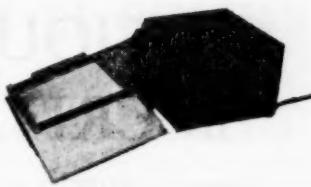
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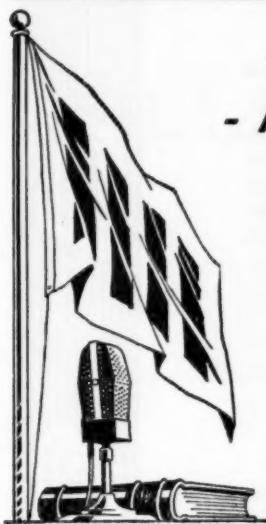
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A Short View of the New Criticism

WILLIAM VAN O'CONNOR¹

I

NO RELATIVELY brief discussion of the new criticism can take into account the many and divergent lines of inquiry which one or another of its practitioners has investigated. The bibliography appended to Robert Stallman's *Critiques*, an anthology of the new criticism, lists hundreds of articles and books.² Cleanth Brooks, for one, has said that the term "the new criticism" has hardly proved a happy designation because it seems to imply a "literary guild" and to stress novelty.

Many critics now find themselves, however, with interests and, in general, even a method in common. Most of them would probably agree that the critic should (1) center his attention on the literary work itself, (2) study the various problems arising from examining relationships between a subject matter and

the final form of a work, and (3) consider ways in which the moral and philosophical elements get into or are related to the literary work.

Their emphases are suggested by this statement from T. S. Eliot:

You can never draw the line between aesthetic criticism and moral and social criticism; you cannot draw a line between criticism and metaphysics; you start with literary criticism, and however rigorous an aesthete you may be, you are over the frontier into something else sooner or later. The best you can do is to accept these conditions and know what you are doing when you do it. And, on the other hand, you must know how and when to retrace your steps.

The chief differences between the new criticism and scholarship are that the former attempts to hold more closely to the literary work itself than it does to the social or biographical origins of the work and, second, to evolve criteria that make possible judgments about literary worth.

That the new criticism is a continuation of older English criticism might be demonstrated in various ways,³ most readily perhaps by reference to Samuel Taylor Coleridge. His study of "Venus

¹ University of Minnesota; editor of *American Quarterly*; author of *Sense and Sensibility in Modern Poetry*.

² William Elton's *A Glossary of the New Criticism*, published by Poetry (232 East Erie St., Chicago, Ill.), is a convenient manual for those interested in a more selective bibliography or in a brief discussion of many of the issues and questions raised in this criticism.

³ See, for example, the Johns Hopkins University *Lectures in Criticism* ("Bollingen Series," No. XVI [Pantheon, 1949]).

and Adonis," in *Biographia Literaria*, furnishes a kind of epitome of many of the considerations that recur over and over again in the new criticism: imagination as it relates to versification and the ability to reduce a multitude of feelings to their proper proportion in relation to the total unity of the work; dissociating the literary work from its origins in the writer's own life—so that the work, as Eliot has demanded, lives impersonally and with its own kind of wholeness; dramatizing, or, as James would say, "rendering, not reporting";⁴ union of "creative power and intellectual energy," or, as we say more commonly now, "the union of thought and feeling"; complexity in the sense that one perceives the "flux and reflux of the mind in all its subtlest thoughts" and in the sense that imagery, versification, tone, and so forth, contribute in the most minute ways to the dominant feeling and thematic lines unifying the work. I. A. Richards and T. E. Hulme, two of the seminal figures in the new criticism, are greatly indebted to Coleridge. So also are later critics like Herbert Read and Kenneth Burke. In fact, Coleridge is so much a part of the preconceptions of contemporary criticism that there is probably no critic who is not greatly in his debt. In this sense, then, the new criticism is not *new*—it is a continuation of nineteenth-century English criticism. It is undoubtedly more intensive than Coleridge's. And it is new in that it borrows from contemporary anthropology, philosophy, and psychology—just as Coleridge borrowed from German philosophy.

But the new critics cannot be considered members of a "literary guild." One might think of T. S. Eliot (at least in his

⁴ In praising "Venus and Adonis" Coleridge said, "You seem to be told nothing but to see and hear everything."

earlier work), William Empson, R. P. Blackmur, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, and John Crowe Ransom as being in agreement about most of their critical standards. There is considerable agreement among them, but anyone reading through Mr. Ransom's *The New Criticism* will also be struck by the extent of their disagreements. Ransom's theory, for instance, that much of the concrete detail of the poem is to be looked upon as interesting and pleasant in its own right but irrelevant to the logical or "prose" meaning of the poem is not evident in the work of these other critics; some of them are explicitly in disagreement with it. And *The Anatomy of Nonsense* offers abundant evidence that Yvor Winters is in very considerable disagreement, not merely with Mr. Ransom's theory, but with that of most of their contemporaries.

These disagreements might be documented at length, but to emphasize the disagreements might lead us to overlook the fact that each critic is attempting to establish a body of definable criteria. A concern with such terms as "tension" and "ambiguity" or "expressive form" and "pseudo-reference" or "paradox" and "irony" implies an attempt to establish a body of criteria. Each critic is concerned to develop techniques that will enable the reader to explore the complex parts of the literary work and to make some attempt to evaluate its worth.

Almost all the contemporary critics would probably agree with Robert Penn Warren's statement, in his essay on *The Ancient Mariner*, that the primary problem in examining the meanings of a work of literature is to get at its "internal consistency."⁵ The stated intention of the

⁵ The problem of internal consistency is often raised in conjunction with the problem of multiple interpretations. For instance, in his analysis of *The*

author, if available, may or may not be relevant. Nor will it suffice to say that the meaning is the meaning a work had for its contemporary audience. "Every work," as C. S. Lewis says in *The Personal Heresy*, "that lasts long in the world is continually taking on . . . colors which the artist neither foresaw nor intended." Lionel Trilling, in "Freud and Literature," emphasizes the fact that a twentieth-century audience sees the Oedipus factor—which is not the sole factor—in *Hamlet* in a way the Elizabethans were not prepared to see it.⁶ Elizabethan psychology, as scholars like Lily Bess Campbell and Hardin Craig have made evident, led Shakespeare's audiences to stress other factors, even to see the play in terms that are no longer meaningful or significant to us. If we grant, as we should, the value in attempting to approximate a vision of

Tempest Mark Van Doren makes these comments: "*The Tempest* does bind up in final form a host of themes with which the author has been concerned. . . . One interpretation of *The Tempest* does not agree with another. And there is a deeper trouble in the truth that any interpretation, even the wildest, is more or less plausible. . . . Any set of symbols, moved close to the play, lights up as in an electric field. Its meaning, in other words, is precisely as rich as the human mind, and it says that the world is what it is. But what the world is cannot be said in a sentence. . . ." Obviously, not every play or poem is as rich in multiple meanings as *The Tempest*. Although it seems likely that a play or poem rich in meanings is likely to last a longer time, it does not seem necessary to add that the presence of multiple meanings, which could be fatuous and confused, is an indisputable test of literary value. In other words, multiple meaning, of itself, is no test of greatness. The reader interested in an example of a contemporary poem that has been interpreted in two different ways, each plausible, may read the Brooks and Warren analysis of "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in *Understanding Poetry* and compare it with Roy Basler's analysis in *Sex, Symbolism and Psychology in Literature*.

⁶ W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, in "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Affective Fallacy," discuss those methods of criticism and scholarship that do not concentrate on "internal consistency."

Hamlet as seen by Elizabethan eyes, we do not have to grant that such a vision has exhausted the values of *Hamlet*.

The problem of meaning is phrased somewhat differently by René Wellek and Austin Warren in *Theory of Literature*. "A poem, we have to conclude," they say, "is not an individual experience or a sum of experiences, but only a potential cause of experiences. . . . Thus the real poem must be conceived as a structure of norms, realized only partially in the actual experience of its readers." It is true, they admit, that each work of art has unique aspects, but to overstress uniqueness invites complete critical relativism and an indifference to the similarities and common elements that would make it possible to discuss not merely genre but literature in general. They discuss the division of the literary work into such factors as sound, meaning, character, setting, and point of view, each factor having its subordinate considerations and each interrelated with the other factors. "The work of art, then, appears as an object of knowledge *sui generis*. . . ." Wellek and Warren admit that the *Iliad* as understood by the Greeks is not identical with the *Iliad* we are capable of understanding. Nonetheless, there must be a "substantial identity of 'structure' which has remained the same throughout the ages."⁷

The obvious danger in the effort of the

⁷ Not all the viewpoints in terms of which the structure is seen will be equally capable of grasping it most meaningfully. Therefore, some "hierarchy of viewpoints, a criticism of the grasp of norms, is implied in the concept of the adequacy of interpretation." This dependence on a "system of norms" more or less completely realized by various generations of readers (as well as individuals) would avoid the extremes of absolutism and relativism. It would seem to follow also that one might, after all, by knowing the full potentialities of poetic language, be able to say that particular generations of poets held viewpoints that enabled them to make excellent or poor use of the potentialities of their medium, poetry.

new criticism to set up criteria is that such criteria could become frozen or rigid. Criticism demands acuteness, imagination, and sensibility. Epigones could vulgarize criticism by applying formulas mechanically. The willingness of sensitive critics to realize that each original work may be at variance in some respects with certain of their preconceptions should minimize the danger of employing criteria in a vulgar or mechanical way. To deny the possibility of standards is, on the other hand, to deny the validity of all literary criticism.

II

If one is to discuss the work of literature as literature, it is not enough to attempt to reduce it to its social or biographical origins. Nor is it enough to restate it in terms of its "content." When it has been organized or transmuted into a literary work, the original idea or original lump of experience is a part of the "structure" or "form" of the work. It is no longer, in any complete sense, "content." In other words, the new criticism objects to the old dichotomy of content and form. The principle, simply enough, is that we know in part what a writer says by the way he says it. If he alters the way he says it, he has probably affected not only the appropriateness of his manner or style but the actual meaning of what he has said.

The dichotomy of content and form is apparently a Cartesian and Kantian inheritance. Meaning was commonly held to have a mind-body relationship; rhetorical figures were a dress put upon meaning, like the glove put on the hand. (The attempted divorce of meaning from matter, which was a part of the effort to achieve "mathematical unfeeling" or objectivity, is discussed in the new criticism usually as a part of the

phenomenon labeled by T. S. Eliot the "dissociation of sensibility.") The concern with structure in the new criticism implies some degree of recognition that abstraction emerges from matter. Walter J. Ong, in "The Meaning of the 'New Criticism,'" writes:

The understanding is defective if it does not observe that, however they may be handled in mathematics and minor logic, the most abstract abstractions always come to us in ways which reflect their origins out of material existents. . . . Abstractions cannot be preserved and packaged, but are known and used only as they are being drawn in some way or another out of matter.

The "total meaning" has been one of the chief concerns of I. A. Richards. Meter, diction, metaphor, methods of organizing the poem, and so forth, are to him not ornamental but parts of the total meaning. The poet's attitude toward his subject matter is, or should be, implicit in his meter (the use of the spondee, for example, to slow the metrical movement) and in his diction (the "Mister Death" phrase in Cummings' poem on Buffalo Bill suggests the poet's attitude toward death in this particular context). The meter and the diction are among the factors that generate the tone. And the method of organizing the elements in the poem—the incidental ironies, the juxtaposing of unlike elements, the bringing together of homogeneous elements, the use of alliteration, of internal rhyme, and so forth—also contributes to its meaning. The employment of assonance, for example, can enable a poet to echo and stress a word he does not want to repeat explicitly. The interest in total meaning is related to the belief that there is in literature no true separation of form and content. Meter, diction, and alliteration are not only a part of the form; they are a part of the meaning. Form in this sense is not an envelope; it is a vehicle for the

emergence of the total meaning or total abstraction the writer has made available.

The reader of *The Well Wrought Urn* will be able to observe that Cleanth Brooks thinks of the poem as a structure or form in the sense indicated above. He justifies his use of "paradox" and "irony" as the most available terms to suggest the kinds of indirection and the kinds of qualification he has observed to be characteristic of the total statement (or structure) that composes the poem. To substitute a paraphrase, a simplified meaning, is to destroy a part of the structure and therefore a part of the meaning. (In a somewhat similar way, Allen Tate's analyses of verses by Edna Millay, James Thomson, and John Donne in his "Tension in Poetry" are examinations into patterns of coherent relationships between denotative and connotative meanings in poetry.)

Structure or form is also a key concept in the criticism of the novel. A novelist succeeds or fails in terms of his structure. Mark Schorer says: "What we need in fiction is a devoted fidelity to every technique which will help us discover and evaluate our subject matter, and more than that, to discover the amplifications of meaning of which our subject matter is capable." To take a specific instance, Robert Penn Warren's essay on Hemingway has as its center the concept of an appropriate structure. He explains, first, what he calls the "characteristic Hemingway 'point.'" This includes comments on the initiates in Hemingway's God-abandoned world, the hard-bitten, disciplined men and women who not only savor drinking and sex but have a sharp awareness of the physical world and of light and darkness. Drinking and sex are dramatized as forces that dull the sense of *nada* (death and the meaninglessness

of the physical world), except that with love a margin of human significance or meaning is achieved, and so forth. The successful Hemingway stories occur, Warren says, when "the essential limitations of his premises" have been accepted. The "failures occur when we feel that Hemingway has not respected the limitations of his premises." In the failures, not merely the moral significance or judgment, which we expect to be implied in the action, becomes blurred, but the characteristic irony and the simplified style sound empty and pretentious. Warren's focus, in other words, is on the structure of the stories. Critics like R. P. Blackmur, M. D. Zabel, and F. R. Leavis, we may assume, look to James and to Conrad, in particular, because in them they find artists who have learned how to inform a given subject matter with maximum resonance, meaning, and significance.

Kenneth Burke in "Psychology and Form" is concerned with the contemporary desire for "content," a result, he thinks, of "scientific criteria being unconsciously introduced into matters of purely esthetic judgement." Early in the same essay he shows that the success of *Hamlet*, Act I, is the result of its *form*. Eloquence, he continues, demands a minimizing of interest in fact per se, which is not, of course, a minimizing of interest in fact as it is made available through form or structure. Through an interest in structure

those elements of surprise and suspense are subtilized, carried down into the writing of a line or a sentence, until in all its smallest detail the work bristles with disclosures, contrasts, restatements with a difference, ellipses, images, aphorism, volume, sound-values, in short all that complex wealth of minutiae which in their line-for-line aspect we call style and in their broader outlines we call form.

III

An aspect of what I have called the aesthetic emphasis can be stated in the terms Wallace Stevens used in disagreeing with the Marxists about his function as a poet. He wrote that "one's objective as a poet is to achieve poetry, precisely as one's objective in music is to achieve music." Stevens is saying not that poetry is nonsense but that whatever literary significance it has is not as philosophy or politics but as poetry. Eliot is in partial disagreement on this matter: "The 'greatness' of literature cannot be determined solely by literary standards; though we must remember that whether it is literature or not can be determined only by literary standards."

One of the arguments directed against the new criticism is that by emphasizing form it fails to emphasize moral values and other extra-aesthetic values (content). This argument again is dependent upon the assumption that form and content can be separated. One answer would be in the emphasis in the new criticism on synthesis, tension, irony, complexity, and inclusiveness as opposed to the sentimental, the arbitrary, the merely asserted, and so forth. The maturity with which a moral or political view emerges from the aesthetic form is dependent in part on how well, how impressively, and how vividly the view has been investigated and refracted through the aesthetic medium. The very nature of literary form, demanding, as it does, stylization, that is, selection of detail, understatement, parody, or the manipulation of characters within a given, concrete situation, precludes the possibility of its offering easy rules of thumb for moral, political, or social action. Henry James was given to commenting on the relation between morality and the novel as an art

form. Two passages suggest that James saw, first, the need for considering a subject in its complexity (as the new critics do) in order to arrive at a mature view of the experience being transmuted into art and, second, the necessity to see the moral situation not as a universally valid rule but as an abstraction emerging from a given, concrete instance. The first of these is from *The Art of the Novel*:

There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very close together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. No good novel will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground.

The second is from the Preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*. On the novelist's ability to project any vision of life depends his ability to project a moral view:

Here we get exactly the high price of the novel as a literary form—its power not only, while preserving that form with closeness, to range through all the differences of the individual relation to its general subject-matter, all the varieties of outlook on life, of disposition to reflect and project, created by conditions that are never the same from man to man (or, as far as that goes, from woman to woman), but positively to appear more true to its character in proportion as it strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould.

The very character of the morality implicit in the situation is dependent upon how fully the novelist has been able to dramatize and evoke the thematic lines quickening and informing his structure. In formalist terms, as Wellek and Warren suggest, Eliot's statement about non-literary standards of greatness is a loose statement. In the final analysis, state-

ments about the moral or philosophical elements in a literary work are made inside an aesthetic framework, in terms of the structure that makes these elements available for discussion.

IV

Anyone reading through the new critics will be struck by the frequency with which a number of them give up their close readings, analyses, and evaluations in order to theorize about poetry as knowledge, the cognitive aspects of poetry, the ontology of poetry, and so forth. Richards, in his *Science and Poetry*, discussed as "pseudo-statements" those statements which are not verifiable in scientific terms but which satisfy our emotional needs. But he was unable to recover poetry as a form of knowledge from those (Mr. Tate in his "Literature as Knowledge" and elsewhere lumps them all under the term "Positivist") who assume that only what is verifiable in terms of scientific proofs is knowledge, the rest, irresponsible emotion. Poetic statements were "useful" but not "true." But the later Richards, of the *Philosophy of Rhetoric* and *Coleridge on the Imagination*, got away from the notion that poetry, although valuable in ordering our minds, is irrelevant to the "real" world. In the volume on Coleridge he says: "*Poetry is the completest mode of utterance.*" And in this volume he places poetic language in the realm of myth (with no such pejorative connotations as "pseudo" or "false"). Myths "are those hard realities in projection, their symbolic recognition, coordination and acceptance. . . . Without his mythologies man is only a cruel animal without a soul . . . a congeries of possibilities without order or aim." Philip Wheelwright in "Poetry, Myth, and Religion," Mark Schorer in *William Blake*, and Richard

Chase in *Quest for Myth* also provide valuable studies of myth in relation to poetry. And there are discussions of myth throughout the various works of the southern critics.

Empson, in his much discussed *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, is, although not explicitly, concerned with poetic statements as cognitive. The older preconception is that cognitive language, simple idea, is abstract, is language with fixed meanings. Ong quotes Hugh Blair, a late neoclassical rhetorician whose *Lectures on Rhetoric* was widely used in the nineteenth century: "Simple expression just makes our ideas known to others; but figurative language, over and above, bestows a particular dress upon that idea; a dress which both makes it to be remarked and adorns it." Empson, by showing that the new meaning (tenor) and metaphor (vehicle) *interact*, thereby suggesting a considerable number of meanings (abstractions), is showing that meanings have their origin in matter, in the concrete.

Critics now stress particularity or the concrete and want to insist on its value as a contribution to our knowledge. In myth and archetypal images (studied, for example, by Maud Bodkin), in our affective responses to color and image, and in the way our sensibilities are aroused by what Mr. Ransom has called "the world's body" they want to find evidence of the ways in which literature gives us a kind of knowledge with which science and philosophy are not concerned. Aristotle had said that literature gives us a superior form of knowledge; but Aristotle did not live under the aegis of modern science, which says that only what is verifiable is true. This would seem to put literature, which lives out of the intuition, insights, and imagination of its creators, in a realm of, at best, the

delightful or the useful. Almost all the contemporary critics have been concerned with the status of literature in a scientific-minded world.

Certain of the most zealous proponents of criticism have already given notice that they are more concerned with functioning as critics than with serving literature. The critic as critic is neither philosopher, moralist, nor theoretician. The job of the critic is to help us perceive the nature and worth of the literary work. It is not the function of the critic to offer us coherent systems of philosophy, coherent theories of the nature of language, or even ideological systems that include accounts of poetry as a substitute for religion and the relation of the poet to the economic order. He can use all the information he can get; but, strictly speaking, he can employ his theory or knowledge as a critic only in so far as it is relevant to the particular work or works he is discussing and attempting to make more available for the reader. Once in a while some educationist magnanimously offers to subsume the study of literature under sociology—which would mean the end of the study of literature as an art. It would be ironic, indeed, if a few zealots in criticism managed to raise a complex edifice composed of interrelated lines of knowledge in philosophy, anthropology, and linguistics that was so massive that the literary work beneath it became merely an excuse for the superstructure. Almost everyone in the twentieth century is looking for a kind of knowledge that will be as a Second Coming. It is too much to hope that such knowledge is resting like a genie in the bottle labeled "the new criticism." In "The Function of Criticism" Eliot refers to a criticism that is self-serving as "autotelic." Tate, in a more homely phrase, has discussed it as "the picture apologizing to the frame."

V

In 1858, Sainte-Beuve, in a lecture entitled "A Literary Tradition," distinguished between the duty of the professor of literature and the critic. It is the duty of the professor, he said, to maintain a tradition of good taste and of the critic to discover new talent. He also pointed out that one of the dangers of historical scholarship was to allow, by failing to revivify the past through re-interpretation and reanalysis, a tradition to become moribund. A tradition of good taste can be kept alive only by re-examining it in terms of the sensibility of the contemporary world. Certainly this implies a knowledge of the modern sensibility as it has been expressed and in part formed by modern literature. But literary scholarship until the advent of the critical movement in the universities tended to ignore aesthetic principles as a means of studying literature and attempted to live off the sensibility or taste that had been formed by earlier societies. An increasingly larger number of students and scholars have perceived that they were in the anomalous position of having, in effect, to deny the existence of modern literature and of their own sensibilities, formed, willy-nilly, by the inescapable fact of their living in the twentieth century. They were being asked to perform the feat of admiring the more remote past through, at the latest, the eyes of Matthew Arnold, a man who never forgot that he was writing about his own world. They were not to ask what it is that Wallace Stevens or T. S. Eliot have in common with Crashaw or Pope. A literary tradition, as Sainte-Beuve suggested, is deeply significant only when it is re-examined by each generation. By ignoring basic aesthetic considerations, scholars were allowing our

literary tradition to petrify, to become antiquarian facts. As a consequence, there is now a growing feeling that the scholar should be a critic before he can be trusted as a keeper of the tradition.

In "Miss Emily and the Bibliographer" Tate attacks the notion of a "fixed hierarchy," the illusion, as he calls it, that history has ordered the place to be held by writers in a hierarchy of worth. The assumption that their places are fixed implies that the standards for evaluating them are also rigidly fixed. It implies that a new generation attempting to understand and use the literature of the past has no business altering or modifying any of these fixed judgments. To give concrete instances, it implies that the generation which has written our literature had no business raising Skelton, the Jacobean poets, Dryden, Pope, and Swift to a new eminence while allowing Browning, Swinburne, and many others in the nineteenth century to take lower places. If scholars encouraged, rather than discouraged, acts of critical judgment, if they looked upon our literary tradition as living, then these changes would not seem heretical. Nor would they lead to a chaos of new judgments or even, by and large, harm the reputations of established figures. The willingness to look upon a literary tradition as alive rather than as dead and fixed was discussed by Eliot in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in these sentences (which he repeated in "The Function of Criticism"):

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered;

and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities.

One of the functions of the critic, as Eliot has observed obliquely in his essay on Johnson's "Vanity of Human Wishes" and as Leavis has stated explicitly, is "to define, help form, and organize the contemporary sensibility, and to make conscious the 'standards' in it." Perhaps T. E. Hulme's *Speculations*, a tremendous formative influence on Eliot, Pound, Tate, and, to a lesser extent, Herbert Read, did more than any other book, not merely to help "make conscious the 'standards'" in contemporary literature and criticism, but to define the contemporary sensibility. It also defined the break with Victorianism. (In Hulme there are dicta, sometimes worked out, sometimes not, about scientism, romanticism, the need for a system of religious values, and the structure of poetry.) Hulme discussed the breakup of religious belief and the awful burden thereby thrown on the individual poet to establish, not only his own scale of values, but the vehicles for giving them literary expression. One of the persistent themes running through the new criticism is the consequences of the decay of a religious order. In other words, the new critics, like the cultural historians, are concerned with the rise of science and the decline of religion in the post-Renaissance world. As literary critics, they are concerned with the ways these developments are manifest in language and in literary forms.

Walter de la Mare's "The Riddle"

A Note on the Teaching of Literature with Allegorical Tendencies

EDWARD WAGENKNECHT¹

"Have you guessed the riddle yet?" the Hatter said, turning to Alice again.
"No, I give it up," Alice replied. "What's the answer?"
"I haven't the slightest idea," said the Hatter.
"Nor I," said the March Hare.
Alice sighed wearily. "I think you might do something better with the time," she said, "than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers."—*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

I

WALTER DE LA MARE's priceless apologue, "The Riddle,"² can be used effectively in the teaching of literature all the way from the grades to the college level. It is probably true that such stories depend for the exercise of their full effectiveness upon a certain mystical sensitiveness on the part of the reader or listener. But this is a matter of temperament, not of intellectual sophistication. I have yet to encounter a class, some members of which did not, upon reading this tale, find their souls shaken with wonder and terror.

Following (it seems) the death of their father, seven children come to live with

their grandmother in her house, which had been "built in the time of the Georges. It was not a pretty house, but roomy, substantial, and square; and an elm-tree outstretched its branches almost to the windows."

Though the grandmother is too old to "romp" with the children, she wishes them all to be "bright and gay" in her house. Every morning and every evening they must come to see her, "and bring me smiling faces that call back to my mind my own son Harry." All their other time, except when they are at lessons, is their own. She imposes but one condition upon them. "In the large spare bedroom that looks out on the slate roof there stands in the corner an old oak chest; aye, older than I, my dears, a great deal older; older than my grandmother. Play anywhere else in the house, but not there."

This regime is followed for several weeks. Though the children first feel "gloomy" and "strange," they soon come to be "happy and at home in the great house." Every day the grandmother seems more feeble, but she never fails,

¹ Professor of English, Boston University. Author of *Cavalcade of the English Novel*, etc. His latest publications are *A Fireside Book of Yuletide Tales* (Bobbs-Merrill) and *Murder by Gaslight, Victorian Thrillers* (Prentice-Hall).

² In *The Riddle and Other Stories*, by Walter de la Mare (Alfred A. Knopf, 1923). The story will soon be reprinted in *The Collected Tales of Walter de la Mare*, edited by Edward Wagenknecht, to be published by Alfred A. Knopf. All quotations from "The Riddle" in this article are made by kind permission of the author.

upon seeing them, "to visit her store of sugarplums."

Then, one by one, and two by two, the children are drawn to—and into—the great oak chest. First, Henry; then, Matilda, who could find no pleasure without him; then Harriet and William together; then James and Dorothea; and finally, the oldest, Ann.

The grandmother seems rather nonchalant about it all and increasingly unaware. After Henry's disappearance, when only six, instead of seven, come to her room to bid her goodnight and collect the customary sugarplums, "she looked out between the candles at them as if she were unsure of something in her thoughts." When, next day, Ann tells her that Henry is not to be found, she replies: "Dearie me, child. Then he must be gone away for a time." After a pause she adds: "But remember all of you, do not meddle with the oak chest." After Matilda's disappearance she makes an even more suggestive remark: "Some day maybe they will come back to you, my dears, or maybe you will go to them. Heed my warning as best you may." When Ann is the only one left, she contents herself by squeezing the girl's fingers and remarking, "What lonely old people we are, to be sure!" And after Ann herself has gone, she says nothing. She dodders, half-blind, through the great house, "in her mind . . . a tangled skein of memories—laughter and tears, and little children now old-fashioned, and the advent of friends, and long farewells." She gossips "fitfully, inarticulately, with herself," and settles herself in the window seat.

I have read and discussed this story with many classes, and it is of these discussions that I wish to write. In my own opinion, the light that has come out of these conferences illuminates more than a single story.

I usually begin by asking: "What does the story mean?" and, more specifically: "What happens to the children?" Of course, I get many freak answers which I do not propose to discuss here. (Be it remarked merely that they are no more insane—for the simple reason that they could not be—than many of the notions which learned men have advanced in print concerning the meaning of, say, *Hamlet* or *Moby Dick*.) But most of my students commit themselves, sooner or later, to one of two views: (1) The entrance of the children into the chest represents death. (2) It indicates, rather, their growing up, leaving the grandmother's house, and going out into the world.

Though in certain passages of the story, it is no doubt tempting to regard the grandmother as Time, I have never been greatly attracted myself by the second view. When the children go out of the life of the household into the chest—and this has been pointed out in my classes again and again—they are leaving a larger world for a much smaller one. This cannot possibly suggest going out from childhood into the larger activities of manhood and womanhood. Going out into the garden and disappearing there might have suggested just that; but this symbol was not employed. In other words, if the author had any such idea in mind, he has chosen a singularly inapt symbol. To any normal mind, being closed up in a box suggests death and burial, and it cannot possibly suggest anything else.

However, after the "going out into the world" idea had been presented to me a number of times with considerable emphasis by people who were quite sure that they were right, I put the question to Mr. de la Mare himself, together with another question concerning the character of the grandmother.

The grandmother had never seemed to me a sinister figure; she seemed, rather, doddering, ineffectual kindness, senility. Some of my students, however, were always sure that she was malevolent and that when she mentioned the chest to the children she was actuated by motives similar to those which incited Bluebeard when he forbade Fatima to enter the closet which contained the bodies of his murdered wives.

My first question to Mr. de la Mare was, therefore: "Did you intend to indicate that the childred died or did you mean to indicate that they grew up and went out into the world?" And my second: "Was the grandmother intended to be a sinister figure?"

Writers do not, of course, like to answer such questions. And with good reason, for, in nine cases out of ten, the question concerns some consideration totally irrelevant to the problem which the writer had set himself. It is said that, having written "*The Lady or the Tiger?*" Frank R. Stockton spent a considerable portion of the rest of his life denying that he knew which had emerged from the open door—an honest answer, I am sure. Ibsen always refused to reply to such questions at all, taking his stand on the declaration that what he had written he had written, to which Bernard Shaw returned, characteristically, that the point was rather that what he hadn't written he hadn't written. When Hiram Corson asked Browning whether the line in "*My Last Duchess*"—

... I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together—

meant that the Duke of Ferrara had had his wife put to death, the poet first replied affirmatively, then added, "or he might have had her shut up in a convent." So much Corson—or any of us—

might have figured out for ourselves. The point of the question had been to determine which idea had been held in the writer's mind.³ When Tennyson was asked whether the Three Queens in "*The Passing of Arthur*" represented Faith, Hope, and Charity, he replied: "They mean that and they do not. They are also those three Graces, but they are much more. I hate to be tied down to say, '*This means that*,' because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation." Of course. Poetry is a piece of shot-silk, with many glancing colors. If the image is no larger than the interpretation, why write poetry? Why not a sermon to begin with?

Mr. de la Mare has always, however, had a much better disposition than Tennyson; and he answered at least my first question much more definitely than his relative, Robert Browning had answered Corson's. "Yes," he replied, "I did mean that the childred died."

His answer to the second question was less satisfactory: "The old lady," he wrote, "was not meant to be any more sinister than—well, than she appears."

II

We have, at this point, by no means finished with the "meaning" of the story. For the moment, however, I find it necessary to turn to certain questions of technique.

Stories which partake, as this one does, of the quality of sheer literary magic may not seem, at first blush, promising subjects for analysis. Elisabeth Bergner once astonished an interviewer by denying that Barrie had written *The Boy David* for her. "God," she

³ Is a piece of literature what it *means* to the reader (or to the consensus of readers), or is it what it *meant* to the writer? To those who choose the first horn of the dilemma such questions as these are, of course, irrelevant.

said, "wrote that play!" And, however that may be, "The Riddle" is not the kind of thing they teach you to write for the "market" with the help of a literary correspondence school.

Nevertheless, short and simple as the tale is, it contained one very difficult technical problem. There are seven children who must somehow be got into that chest. That means seven trips. By permitting Harriet and William to go together and James and Dorothea to go together, Mr. de la Mare succeeds in getting the number down to five, a piece of literary economy which recalls the story of the farmer who took his son to a concert which consisted entirely of solo work in the first half but included a number of duets toward the close. At this point, the old man turned to the boy and remarked, "You see, son, it's getting late now; so they're taking them two at a time."

Now every writer knows that if you are going to repeat your effects in literature you must increase your pressure with each repetition. Otherwise you will get not climax but anticlimax. The *Beowulf* poet knew this well. Beowulf fights Grendel; then he fights Grendel's mother. But the dam is a much more ferocious monster, who places the hero's life in far greater jeopardy. Further to heighten the reader's blood pressure, the poet causes the second battle to take place in a very weird and impressive setting beneath the mere.

Here is the first visit to the chest—Henry's—as described by Mr. de la Mare:

It was evening twilight when Henry went upstairs from the nursery by himself to look at the oak chest. He pressed his fingers into the carved fruit and flowers, and spoke to the dark-smiling heads at the corners; and then, with a glance over his shoulder, he opened the lid and looked in. But the chest concealed no treasure,

neither gold nor baubles, nor was there anything to alarm the eye. The chest was empty,⁴ except that it was lined with silk of old-rose, seeming darker in the dusk, and smelling sweet of pot-pourri. And while Henry was looking in, he heard the softened laughter and the clinking of the cups downstairs in the nursery; and out at the window he saw the day darkening. These things brought strangely to his memory his mother who in her glimmering white dress used to read to him in the dusk; and he climbed into the chest; and the lid closely gently down over him.

This is magnificent, but how can a man dare to write like that, with four more visits to go?

Matilda goes next, and this time the problem is skilfully evaded:

But Matilda could not forget her brother Henry, finding no pleasure in playing without him. So she would loiter in the house thinking where he might be. And she carried her wood doll in her bare arms, singing under her breath all she could make up about him. And when in a bright morning she peeped in on the chest, so sweet-scented and secret it seemed that she took her doll with her into it—just as Henry himself had done.

This comes but three short paragraphs after Henry's adventure; the reader is still sufficiently under the spell of the first description to be able to carry its power over; in any event, the important thing, in this instance, is that *the thing is going to happen again*. It is upon that naked fact, and not upon the circumstances surrounding it, that the author now relies to secure the desired shock. An elaborately wrought description is

⁴ The emptiness of the chest recalls Lissa Ysaye's delightful variation of the Bluebeard story in "The True Story of Bluebeard," *The Inn of Disenchantment* (Houghton Mifflin, 1917), in which Fatima finds the secret chamber "absolutely empty." She never forgives her husband "for giving her nothing to forgive"; she had "rapturously believed in the secret room and all the wonders and terrors of it"; she feels quite let down, consequently, and her husband is, thereafter, commonplace and uninteresting in her eyes.

therefore not only unneeded at this point; it would actually be bad art.

Harriet and William go next, and then James and Dorothea. And now individual characterization enters, and this is very significant. Up until now it was terrible enough that the chest—whatever it is or whatever it may symbolize—should "get" a child and then another child. But we cannot—fortunately for our sanity in a world in which we have to read the newspapers—we cannot go on being deeply moved by the fate of people *whom we do not know*; our imaginations are not strong enough for that. Before the chest exercises its malevolent magic again, we must, therefore, be made acquainted with the *individuals* whom this time it will destroy.

"Now Harriet and William were friends together, pretending to be sweethearts; while James and Dorothea liked wild games of hunting, and fishing, and battles." (The quiet, loving ones and the stalwart, active ones—death lies in wait for both!) The background for the Harriet-William tragedy is as rich as that which was sketched for us when Henry left; but, though there is no conflict in tone between the two pictures, we do find a refreshing variety:

On a silent afternoon in October Harriet and William were talking softly together, looking out over the slate roof at the green fields, and they heard the squeak and frisk of a mouse behind them in the room. They went together and searched for the small, dark hole from whence it had come out. But finding no hole, they began to finger the carving of the chest, and to give names to the dark-smiling heads, just as Henry had done. "I know! let's pretend you are Sleeping Beauty, Harriet," said William, "and I'll be the Prince that squeezes through the thorns and comes in." Harriet looked gently and strangely at her brother; but she got into the box and lay down, pretending to be fast asleep; and on tiptoe William leaned over, and seeing how big was the chest he stepped in to kiss the Sleeping

Beauty and to wake her from her quiet sleep. Slowly the carved lid turned on its noiseless hinges. And only the chatter of James and Dorothea came in sometimes to recall Ann from her book.

The James-Dorothea scene is described more briefly, but in the ordinary sense even more vividly:

Snow was falling through the still air upon the roof; and Dorothea was a fish in the oak chest, and James stood over the hole in the ice, brandishing a walking-stick for a harpoon, pretending to be an Esquimaux. Dorothea's face was red, and her wild eyes sparkled through her tousled hair. And James had a crooked scratch upon his cheek. "You must struggle, Dorothea, and then I shall swim back and drag you out. Be quick now!" He shouted with laughter as he was drawn into the open chest. And the lid closed softly and gently down as before.

Ann goes very quietly, in her sleep. In this case we have an introductory paragraph, describing the girl propped up in bed, reading fairy stories, as was her custom, "and the gently-flowing moonlight of the narrative seemed to illumine the white pages, and she could hear in fancy fairy voices. . ." Ann is the oldest of the children, perhaps considerably older than the others, and she is the last to go; but her reading shows that she is still a child at heart. And when we realize this, we give up any hope we may have cherished that she might escape the general doom. She puts out her candle and goes to sleep, "with a confused babel of voices close to her ear, and faint swift pictures before her eyes." Then "in the dead of night" she rises "in dream" and moves "silently through the vacant house."

. . . Past the room where her grandmother was snoring in brief, heavy slumber, she stepped light and surely, and down the wide staircase. And Vega the far-shining stood over against the window above the slate roof. Ann walked in the strange room as if she were being guided by the hand towards the oak chest. There, just as if

she was dreaming it was her bed, she laid herself down in the old rose silk, in the fragrant place. But it was so dark in the room that the movement of the lid was indistinguishable.

This is the stillest going of all, as befits the character of the girl, and therefore the most irresistible, the most terrible. There is no struggle, and volition is not now involved. We could not at this stage "do" with that, any more than we could endure a long speech of Juliet's following the tenor aria with which Romeo sang himself to death. It is enough to know that it had to be.

It is important to notice, too, that, though Mr. de la Mare achieves variety everywhere else, he purposely, monotonously, repeats his description of the closing of the lid. This occurs at every departure except Matilda's, and the repetition itself helps to increase our feeling of inescapable doom: "the lid closed gently down over him"; "Slowly the carved lid turned on its noiseless hinges"; "And the lid closed softly and gently down as before." Then the perfect climax, as the story fades away into the land of dreams out of which it has come: "But it was so dark in the room that the movement of the lid was indistinguishable."

There is so much that is beautifully suggestive in "The Riddle" that the possibilities for commentary are inexhaustible; nor, probably, would any two commentators choose quite the same points. Myself, I wish to call attention to the following:

1. The very beginning of the narrative: "So these seven children, Ann, and Matilda, James, William and Henry, Harriet and Dorothea, came to live with their grandmother." One little word "so" places the story, at the very outset, in the immemorial atmosphere of the folk tale, without beginning and without end.

2. The skilful use of the irrelevant in both the Matilda and the James-Dorothea episodes. "Dorothea's face was red, and her wild eyes sparkled through her tousled hair. And James had a crooked scratch upon his cheek." Dorothea's face and eyes are a part of her characterization; James's scratch might have happened to anybody. Yet how vivid it is! Matilda "carried her wood doll in her bare arms." This detail adds more than vividness; every word has been carefully chosen. The uncomfortable doll presses against the naked flesh, and a kinesthetic sensation is at once communicated to the reader. Matilda's, as we have already seen, is the one departure in which our attention is purposely not focused on the details of the going itself. Nor is she characterized, as Harriet and William are characterized. But if we are to savor the full terror of what is happening to these children, it is important that we must be made to realize that they are human, vulnerable, flesh and blood.

3. The sensitive beauty of Harriet's behavior as she climbs into the box. "Harriet looked gently and strangely at her brother; but she got into the box and lay down, pretending to be fast asleep; and on tiptoe William leaned over, and . . . stepped in to kiss the Sleeping Beauty. . . ." Obviously, Harriet and William are not participating in an actual sexual experience. But they are "friends together, pretending to be sweethearts," and at the moment they are enacting *Sleeping Beauty*, which is a love drama. As the girl-child anticipates motherhood, before she knows what it is, when she plays with her dolls, so every action of the girl here suggests woman's immemorial role in the love drama. From the first boy and girl left alone together to the last that shall live upon this earth,

the one will look "gently and strangely" at the other, as she lies down at his behest to embark upon an adventure whose end is life but whose condition, for the woman, is the risk of death.

4. Finally, the mention of "Vega the far-shining" standing over against the window above the slate roof as Ann goes to her doom. For here, for a brief moment, we perceive that the human drama is playing itself out upon a cosmic stage. This is profoundly characteristic of Mr. de la Mare, as all readers of *Memoirs of a Midget* will remember. I know only one other British novel in which the stars play so impressive a role. This is Thomas Hardy's *Two on a Tower*, a much inferior work from every other point of view.

III

I return, now, to "meaning," a matter which cannot be completely appreciated except with the full richness of the story in mind. Just at the point where my students have finally demonstrated their complete inability to agree with one another concerning "The Riddle," I generally ask whether they are sure that the story is an allegory.

It must, of course, be made clear that the alternative is nothing so desperate as to interpret the tale on the realistic level. I have had students who informed me that the children could not possibly have died when they went into the chest; if they did, what became of the bodies? And I have never found any reply to make to them. I admit frankly that there are some people whom I cannot teach!

In a sense, of course, all fiction is allegory. More and more, modern writers strive for individuality in characterization. This has not always been the case. Characters are not greatly individualized in folk stories or in the parables of

Jesus, yet we find ourselves going back for illumination to tales like these—as we return, too, to the "caricatures" of Dickens—far more frequently than we refer to the more highly developed personages of our contemporary novels. Art rests upon the fundamental kinship of human beings; it is only disciples of Gertrude Stein and poets-talking-to-themselves who have surrendered the idea that art is communication. Individualize to such an extent that the type element in your characterization disappears altogether, and you will have a freak, who will have no significance whatever, save as an intellectual curiosity, for any of your readers.

As commonly defined, however, allegory means something more than that, and it is well that the distinction should be kept in mind. In discussing Melville's "Benito Cereno," Rosalie Feltenstein has recently remarked illuminatingly: "Consistent sustained allegory is incompatible with the story, for although the characters and the situation stand for more than themselves, they do so by extension of their significance, not by their equation with other objects."⁵

"Extension of their significance" indicates excellently well, I believe, the kind of thing we have in "The Riddle." To begin with, we are in the atmosphere of the wonder tale. No author creating in our milieu could possibly expect that any reader, confronting the oak chest, should not immediately think of the tree in Eden, of Pandora's box, and of Bluebeard's closet. He must, therefore, have wanted us to think of these things.

He must also have known that the reader would at once suspect that there was more in the story than met the eye but that, at the same time, he would

⁵ "Melville's 'Benito Cereno,'" *American Literature*, XIX (1947), 245-55.

have great difficulty in deciding just how that "more" should be defined. He must have known that disagreements would appear among different readers. He must have been aware that he had not given any reader the data necessary to "prove" any interpretation. The resultant vagueness and uncertainty must, therefore, have been a part of his plan, of the aim and object that he had in view. And I think we can see why all this should be true.

Ordinarily, to be sure, we demand clearness of impression in literature, first of all. But when one comes to deal with a story which hovers on the edge of the supernatural, does not the question somewhat change its aspect? Here is the realm dedicated above all others to the mysterious and the incomprehensible. Do we really want it charted like the streets of Chicago? (Many spiritualistic séances, precisely because this element of wonder is not present, seem about as thrilling, as romantic, and as mysterious as an income-tax return.) Does not Scott increase our sense of his power in "Wandering Willie's Tale" when he deliberately leaves the door about an inch open at the end for a naturalistic solution of the wonderful events recorded? When the vampire and serpent-woman, Geraldine, disrobes in Coleridge's "Christabel,"

. . . she unbound

The cincture from beneath her breast:
Her silken robe, and inner vest,
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! her bosom and half her side—
A sight to dream of, not to tell.
Oh, shield her! shield sweet Christabel!

What was bared? We are not told, and for this very reason every reader then automatically begins to co-operate with Coleridge in telling the story. Instead of

being tied down to *one* horrible thing—the single interpretation which Tennyson rejected—we can now conjure up *all* the horrible things that we can think of! Now this is precisely the kind of effect that lies beyond the range of the cinema. Consequently, supernatural horror stories, though popular on the screen, can appeal there only to a depraved taste, being greeted often, at climactic moments, with screams and even with howls of hysterical laughter. It is doubtful that anyone ever either screamed or laughed while reading LaFanu or M. R. James.

We may find another interesting illustration of all this in Chaucer's greatest story, "The Pardoners Tale." Here the Old Man, who sends the revelers to their death, is universally accepted as one of the most moving figures in medieval literature. And here, again, it is clear that he is something more than an old man. But what? Death? Old Age? The Wandering Jew? Christ? The Devil? All these views have been advanced, and great names in the field of Chaucerian scholarship have been enlisted in behalf of several of them.

But surely, if Chaucer had intended his character to be thus recognized, if the power of his story had been in any sense dependent upon such an identification, then he would have made the point clear—clear enough, at any rate, so that all sane readers would have found themselves accepting some one, clearly demonstrable, identification, not scattering themselves among several. If this is not true, then Chaucer has failed to communicate his idea in the very story that we accept as his masterpiece.

But suppose Chaucer did not wish to have an identification made. Suppose he wished merely to enrich the emotional overtones of his story by raising many questions and settling none of them.

Suppose he intended the Old Man to stand for more than himself by an extension of his significance and not by his equation with another object.

Also some such line, I am convinced, we must make our approach to literature of this variety.

One thing more: My students—thank God!—do not, for the most part, belong to the “intelligentsia.” Consequently, I have not once had a student tell me that, like the play *Death Takes a Holiday*, “The Riddle” represents a dramatization of the Freudian “death-wish.” For what I have thus been spared I cannot sufficiently state my gratitude. There are circles, however, in which this would be the very first interpretation offered. It is a plain misinterpretation, but it happens to be a misinterpretation which illustrates a valuable point.

“The Riddle” first appeared between covers in America, in the book which bears its name, in 1923. For any reader in touch with current thinking, encountering the story first at that time, it must have been very difficult to avoid the Freudian interpretation. But the story, just as we have it, first saw print in England, in the *Monthly Review*, in 1900. At that time Walter de la Mare, *aet.* twenty-seven, had almost certainly never heard of Freud.

He has heard of him since, but he has always, to use a current slang expression, remained more or less “allergic” to him. Freud’s name occurs but once in Mr. de la Mare’s vast anthology of literature con-

cerning dreams, the unconscious, etc., *Behold, This Dreamer!*, and he is never mentioned at all in the encyclopedic compilation of child lore, *Early One Morning in the Spring*. In short, there is no modern writer less likely to write a story under Freudian inspiration.

This does not, of course, mean that Mr. de la Mare could not have had in mind, from his own observation or from other reading, while writing “The Riddle,” the same aspects or tendencies of human experience that the Freudians have observed in connection with what they call the “death-wish.” It does most emphatically mean, however, that “The Riddle” was not influenced by Freud, that it is not Freudian literature. If we can so easily make such a mistake in dealing with a contemporary story, how many pitfalls must inevitably engulf us when we begin to babble about the “influences” upon Chaucer or Shakespeare, in an age for which most of us have a very imperfect sense of chronology and overwhelming ignorance concerning most of the factors by which literature is conditioned!

And now, if anybody tells me in conclusion that the story must be an allegory because it is called “The Riddle,” I can only refer him to Alice, as she is quoted at the beginning of this article. Alice didn’t, in general, care for riddles that have no answers, but I think she would have liked Mr. de la Mare. She was just the type that responds most eagerly.

"The Iceman" Seen through "The Lower Depths"

VIVIAN C. HOPKINS¹

SOME light may be thrown on the fog still surrounding the meaning of O'Neill's latest play by comparing it with an earlier play of Gorky, *The Lower Depths*, to which *The Iceman Cometh* bears a striking resemblance.

The dimly lighted setting of O'Neill's "End of the Line Café" recalls Gorky's dirty, crowded dosshouse. The characters in both plays—dregs of society—belong in their broken-down homes. O'Neill's people are degraded rather than corrupt, Gorky's for the most part actual criminals, but both sets are beyond the pale of respectable life. In both plays the drab color of existence is brightened by a rosy glow projected from the characters' imaginations—the pipe dreams which make reality easier to bear. Both dramatists have created a "foreign" character—O'Neill, Hickey; Gorky, Luka—who seeks to understand the others' pipe dreams and to improve their lives. In the interpretation of "illusion versus reality" lies the striking difference between the two plays and, by contrast with *The Lower Depths*, the key to understanding the dramatic meaning of *The Iceman*.

I

In *The Lower Depths* Gorky has a realistic purpose, and he emphasizes materialistic values. For his setting he used an actual dosshouse that he knew. An occasional symbolic overtone appears. One direction, appearing in Gorky's plan for the play but not in the finished ver-

sion, says that, at the end, all the characters troop out of the dark dosshouse into the daylight. The suggestion, which bears a startling likeness to the exit of O'Neill's characters from the saloon in Act III, was no doubt discarded by Gorky as too easy an answer to the dosshouse problems. Throughout, Gorky's play keeps the somber colors of actual life. In flashes of sardonic humor Gorky shows the poverty, cruelty, and immorality of this life. When Peppel says he feels sorry for Natasha, Bubnov nods: "Like a wolf for a sheep." To Vassilissa's urging that he take her out of the place, Peppel replies, "You're no nail and I'm no pair of pliers."

In his characters Gorky succeeded in reproducing real people of his own time. Even his minor characters have two dimensions: kind, shifty Luka, anxious to please everyone; Bubnov, with his cruel wit; Kleshtch, the worker, frustrated in his dreams of escape.

To forget their present misery, the characters console themselves with pipe dreams of the past or the future; the Baron, formerly an aristocrat, now Nastya's pimp, dreams of earlier prosperity; Nastya, the prostitute, forgets her shame by projecting herself into the heroines of romantic love stories; the broken-down Actor, with the help of drink, recalls his former fame; Kleshtch defends his creed of salvation through work, refusing to admit that he has made his wife Anna sick by beating her; Koshtylov, the landlord, covers his cruelty to his tenants by a pseudo-religious

¹ New York State Teachers College, Albany, N.Y.

faith; Vassilissa persuades her former lover, Peppel, that she will help him escape with her sister Natasha, though she plans to use him as a means of getting rid of both Kostylyov and Natasha; Peppel, the son of a thief, blames society for his own career of thieving; Natasha, too spineless to try to improve her lot, dwells in an indefinite hope that something better will come.

Luka, a pilgrim and a human, likable old busybody, pokes his nose into the business of all the other lodgers. Finding that the prostitute Nastya drinks from a desire to escape, Luka encourages her romantic reading, as a palliative for her hard life, at the same time that he urges the Baron to treat her more kindly. As Anna dies, Luka consoles her by confirming her belief in heaven. Luka promises the Actor that he can go to a hospital to cure his alcoholism but urges him to start tapering off by himself. To Peppel, Luka gives the urgent advice to get away while there is yet time.

Though curious about everyone, Luka does not give all the people concrete advice. From Bubnov he draws the story of his wife's infidelity; from Satin the confession that he started on the downward path by killing a man who had deceived his sister. Finding some good in Bubnov and Satin, Luka still does not give them a suggestion on how to reform; he is merely interested in finding out their history. To Vassilissa and Kostylyov, however, he gives no reforming advice because he feels them to be hopeless. They are worthless people who will corrupt others unless they get away.

Luka's advice is suspect in the doss-house. Of Luka's plans for curing the Actor's alcoholism, Satin exclaims: "Bunk! You'll get nowhere. It's nothing but a damn pipe dream." Bubnov wonders why Luka lies so much; Kleshtch

complains that he beckoned them to go somewhere, but didn't show them the road. When Luka slips away at the end of Act III, he has brought about no change in the others' lives. Peppel has failed to run away with Natasha, Natasha has been tortured, Kostylyov killed, Peppel and Vassilissa put in jail. When the police arrive, Luka, himself a fugitive from justice, fades quickly. We never discover the secret of Luka's own life; he remains the pilgrim without passport, who arrives mysteriously and departs suddenly, a seeker very much like Gorky himself, who peers into other lives but keeps his own secrets hidden.

In Gorky's presentation of the quarrel between illusion and objective truth, Luka stands for illusion, defending the imaginative pipe dreams which make life easier to bear; Bubnov, Satin, Peppel, Kleshtch, the realists of the play, for hardheaded acceptance of reality. At first Peppel encourages Luka to rattle on: "Go on lying. There's darn little in this world that's pleasant." Finally, however, when Peppel insists that Luka tell him whether God exists or not, Luka replies: "If you believe in him, he exists. If you don't, he doesn't. Whatever you believe in exists."

This answer, of course, reveals Luka himself as a skeptic—an optimistic, kindly skeptic, with a vague trust in humanity and an undefined faith that human beings would be happier if they treated people mercifully, as Christ did—but a skeptic, nonetheless. Luka's pity for others thus becomes a rather aimless thing: "It can do no harm," he says. Luka questions the value of truth. "What do you want the truth for?" he asks Peppel. "It might come down on you like an ox."

This skeptical attitude toward truth is explained by the characters' acute

awareness of their poverty. "What can we do with the truth," Kleshtch asks, "when even without it we can't breathe?"

Kleshtch's skepticism here shows more direct facing of reality than do the others' romantic dreams—it is a fighter's skepticism, based squarely upon economic need. Unless you have the minimum of creature comforts, truth cannot help you. If people are doomed to live like cockroaches, Luka's pleasant, pitying lies are better than harsh truth.

Gorky's positive position on the question of illusion versus truth is advanced by Satin in the last act, after Luka's departure, when Satin expresses his belief in humanity and his dream of a future state in which every human being will actually possess a dignity that is now only a possibility. Luka's strong point, Satin insists, was his respect for the individual soul, which Satin also finds necessary for a better world. The ringing theme of Satin's speech, however, is that in a good economic world men will no longer need fictions. "Lies," he says, "are the religion of slaves and bosses. Truth is the god of the free man. . . . Man! It's magnificent! It has a proud ring! Man! We have to respect him, not pity him . . . —let's drink to man, Baron!"

One can appreciate the terrific effect of this theme of equality for all humanity upon the Moscow Art audience of December, 1902, filled with liberals who shared Gorky's faith in revolution. In this play both work and religion are discounted as solutions for life's ills. Revolution is the ideal, expressed by Satin in his revolutionary speech and in his simple comment to the Baron: "In the coach of the past nobody gets anywhere." Through the crime, filth, and brutality of life in the dosshouse, Satin's peroration appears as a bright, strong, hopeful note, expressing Gorky's passionate be-

lief in revolution. Chekhov criticized the dramatic action of this play because Luka, the most interesting character, was removed from the last act. On the other hand, to underline his revolutionary theme, Gorky could not have done better than to remove the character who stood for the pleasant fictions that soften man's misery and to let Satin take stage to speak out powerfully for a state in which man has dignity and can accept the truth straight.

Satin's speech does not end the play. At the opening of Act IV, the alcoholic Actor, having given up hope of a cure, speaks one last sad speech and goes out. When his suicide is disclosed at the end of the play, Satin speaks the casually brutal curtain line, "Spoiled the song, the fool!"

Gorky used this dramatic action, I think, to show that the new state of society dreamed of by Satin still lies in the future. *The Lower Depths* is a realistic play, in which the characters' only palliatives are drink and dreams. For the Actor, to whom drink is also poison, death is the only way out. The others, either too weak or too strong to take this desperate method, will go on as they have done. Death has already appeared for Anna and Kostylyov, perhaps also for Peppel and Natasha. In this society one cannot feel too sorry for one who dies; Satin's comment that the Actor has spoiled the song, melodramatic though it is, fits the situation exactly.

II

With Gorky's realistic play before us, let us look at *The Iceman*, a symbolic play emphasizing spiritual values. Although Harry Hope's is based on the actual Jimmy the Priest's, where O'Neill, on his uppers, lived for a time between 1911 and 1912, the distance of twenty-seven years,

from 1939 to 1912, has blurred the outlines of the saloon, giving even that dingy setting the glamour of some distance in time. A similar effect of distance from reality prevails in the characters.

Except for Larry, Harry Hope, and Jimmy Tomorrow, O'Neill's people are chiefly types: Hickey is the supersalesman; the whores are stage whores; Piet and Cecil, stage soldiers. As a group, the characters add up to escape from the responsibilities of life. The iceman symbolizes death. Perhaps as a consequence of the symbolic purpose, the general tone of *The Iceman* is serious. Lines like "Bessie wasn't a bitch, she was a goddam bitch," fail to attain the quick bite of Gorky's humor.

With this contrast in purpose, a striking similarity appears between Gorky's degenerates and O'Neill's bums: both use dreams to evade reality. Some of the characters' situations are closely parallel to those of Gorky. Willie Oban, for example, Harvard graduate and son of a bucket-shop operator who went to jail, dreaming of getting a job in the D.A.'s office, resembles the Baron in former glory. The bartender Rocky, pimp for Margie and Pearl, indulges in the pipe dream of calling himself the girls' manager, while they admit to being tarts, but not whores—this situation closely resembles the unwillingness of Gorky's Baron to admit that he is a pimp and of Nastya to admit that she is a prostitute. Chuck, the other bartender, and Margie, an older streetwalker, dream of marriage as a Utopia, very much as Gorky's Peppel and Natasha discuss marriage as a way out of the dosshouse.

Although the other inhabitants of Harry Hope's differ from Gorky's characters in situation, they all resemble Gorky's dreamers in surveying their

home through the golden haze of alcoholic illusion. Harry Hope, the owner, pretends that love for his dead wife Besie keeps him out of politics, though actually, alive, she was a shrew who made his life miserable; Jimmy Tomorrow, who lost his job because of drink, insists that his wife's unfaithfulness drove him to it; Hugo, the broken-down anarchist, dreams of leading a successful Socialist movement; Joe, the Negro, of again running a prosperous gambling-house. Piet and Wetjoen talk of earning money for passage home, refusing to admit that they have left behind unsavory traces that make return impossible; Mosher and McGloin imagine their return to the circus and the police force, former fields of graft where they have done too well. Larry, the Foolosopher, insists that he has no pipe dream. Actually, he pretends to be in love with death while he clings to his wretched life with a desperate hold. Parritt, a stool pigeon who has lost faith in the Movement and betrayed his mother, seeks comfort in telling his story to Larry, his mother's former lover.

Just as Luka defended his lies, so in Act I of *The Iceman*, Larry defends the pipe dream. "To hell with the truth!" he exclaims. "The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober." Beneath this tolerance of pipe dreams lies Larry's philosophical attitude, a skepticism comparable to Luka's, but pessimistic rather than optimistic: "Honor or dishonor, faith or treachery are nothing to me but the opposites of the same stupidity which is ruler and king of life and in the end they rot into dust in the same grave, all things are the same meaningless joke to me, for they grin at me from the one skull of death." Unlike the characters of *The Lower Depths*, Larry bases his skep-

ticism not upon economic need but upon the disillusion which he has experienced in finding greed in all human beings.

When Parritt voices pity for the unfortunates of Bedrock Bar, Larry sharply reprobates him: "Don't waste your pity. They wouldn't thank you for it." Though he speaks against it, Larry himself shows pity at one time or another for all the inhabitants of Harry Hope's—even, finally for Parritt. The real critic of pity, parallel to Satin in *The Lower Depths*, is Hickey. Attacking the pity which encourages a man to sink lower while consoling himself with a pipe dream, Hickey advocates the kind of back-slapping sympathy which forces a man to face his own faults and get back on his feet.

Like Gorky's Luka, Hickey works as a catalyst on the inhabitants of Harry Hope's to incite them to action. Already known to them as a generous buyer of drinks, Hickey gets a better reception than Luka. He is one up on Luka also in already knowing their pipe dreams, so that he can start at once to reform them. Hickey's method of attack, of course, is the direct opposite of Luka's; while Luka sells pipe dreams as palliatives for reality, Hickey tries to force his friends to give up their pipe dreams entirely, as he has done. Hickey's idea of reform is not Satin's theory of the economic uplift of society, but an individual recovery of self-respect by facing reality squarely. A rather simple person himself, Hickey makes no attempt to define reality; nor does he show Luka's discrimination in leaving some to their old dreams, giving others new ones, or ignoring some as hopeless. With kindly enthusiasm, Hickey applies his new-found formula to all alike. As his former cronies become suspicious, Larry warns them about Hickey's message: "Better make sure first it's the real McCoy and not poison"—a ra-

tional criticism that recalls Satin's names for Luka's illusions: "bunk," "fata morgana," "lies."

Overcoming their resistance by an evangelistic supersalesmanship, Hickey browbeats them into facing the light of day. Next morning, one by one they file out into the street—Hope's exit the most dramatic and his return the swiftest of all—and by night, all are back, broken in spirit, having failed in the business world but also failing to recall the peace of their accustomed dreams.

Puzzled by their failure, Hickey explains his own pipe dream and tells how he destroyed it. His wife's pipe dream has been her loving faith that some day he would give up his periodicals; his own, that he really loved her enough to give up drink. Feeling the urge for a binge and knowing that he could not stand another session of forgiveness, he has killed his wife before coming to Harry's. Paradoxically, since that act, he has felt at peace and has no desire to drink. Hickey has, however, fooled himself right up to the moment of confession, when he blurts out his taunt to Evelyn after he killed her ("You know what you can do with your pipe dream now, you damned bitch!"). The confession shows that he really killed from hate, not love, and that the only way out now is death. As the others listen to his confession in the last act, all (except Parritt and Larry) become convinced that Hickey must have been crazy and that his message therefore means nothing. The quarreling caused by Hickey's soul-searchings dissolves as at the touch of a wand, and they again sink happily into a whiskey-bath which makes their former pipe dreams real. Stripped of their illusions, they are pitiful, weak people; given back their pipe dreams, they can endure life, but they still lack any trace of nobility.

For Larry, peace does not return so easily. Recognizing from the first that Hickey's release is the peace of death, he has looked into his own soul and admitted his fear of death. He prays to God for a few more days: "Let me clutch greedily to my yellow heart this sweet treasure, this jewel beyond price, this dirty, stinking bit of withered old flesh which is my beautiful little life!"

Just as Hickey's murder of his wife removed the desire for drink which caused him to kill her, so, paradoxically, Larry's clear-sighted awareness of his own fear gives him courage. As he drops the mask of philosophical detachment, he accepts the moral responsibility for Parritt's sin, which he has tried to dodge throughout the play. Parritt, too, admits that his stories about the betrayal of his mother were all lies—he killed her because he hated her. Larry's angry command, "Go! Get the hell out of life before I choke it out of you!" stills the conflict in Parritt's soul and gives him a peace that Parritt could not have reached alone. For Larry, the act involves recognition of justice and punishment, values of the world which he had tried to forget. After Parritt's jump from the fire-escape, Larry is moved by pity, of the right kind, fulfilling the destiny suggested for him at the beginning in O'Neill's description of his face, like that "of a pitying but weary old priest." Realizing that he now longs sincerely for death, Larry says: "By God, I'm the only real convert to death Hickey made here." Unlike the others, Larry cannot resume the comfortable cloak of his pipe dream, and he is left in stark loneliness to wait for death, the only messenger of true peace.

Larry's sentence and Parritt's suicide, representing together the one dynamic action of the last act of *The Iceman*, show, of course, a similarity to the Ac-

tor's suicide at the end of *The Lower Depths*. In both plays the actions receive little comment from those on stage; in Gorky's play we have only Satin's casual curtain line; in O'Neill's, only Larry is aware of the suicide. In O'Neill's play one feels some sense of relief that Parritt's tortured soul has been freed, but the whole scene is charged with a negative attitude which lacks dramatic vitality. There is no positive element in the last act of *The Iceman* to furnish the kind of dramatic contrast to the suicide which Gorky provided in Satin's revolutionary speech. There may have been as many devotees of death in the New York audience of 1946 as there were liberals in the Moscow audience of 1902; but the negativism which Larry expresses does not arouse that union of emotional and intellectual reaction which makes a dramatic experience overwhelming. The same theme of justice, for example, occurs in Vinnie's punishment of herself at the end of *Mourning Becomes Electra*; it makes good dramatic stuff there, where the audience has first seen the sinning and afterward witnessed the punishment. In *The Iceman*, where Parritt's sin has been reported rather than projected in action, it packs a weaker punch. The final impression is one of gray indefiniteness, lacking the vivid black and white of compelling tragedy.

The dialectical materialism which gives dramatic force to Gorky's play appears also in *The Iceman*, but with a negative presentation. Larry forms almost an exact counterpart to Gorky's Satin. Once an ardent Socialist, he became convinced that no revolutionary movement would destroy man's greed, and the disillusionment so colored his whole view of life that he became a complete pessimist.

Socialism has only one pitiful defend-

ant in the play: Hugo, a former anarchist who has served a term for his beliefs, who now shows softening of the brain, and who wakes from his alcoholic dream only to label as "bourgeois swine" those who refuse to buy a drink. Hickey relentlessly exposes Hugo as a Socialist who dreams of power for himself. Trying to deny the accusation, Hugo really confirms it: "I love only the proletariat! I will lead them! I will be like a God to them! They will be my slaves!"

O'Neill's analysis of social reform, of course, goes deeper than Gorky's. Through Larry he presents the concept that a rearrangement of material goods cannot alter man's spirit. In contrast to Gorky's prerevolutionary theory—uncritical, full of hope in the reform to be wrought by a material upheaval—O'Neill shows the view of a postrevolutionary: tired, disillusioned, skeptical of any permanent change for the better in human nature. Granting that O'Neill's philosophical searching goes deeper than Gorky's, one still finds his negative solution less powerful than Gorky's as the stuff for dramatic action.

III

The comparison of *The Iceman* with Gorky's *Lower Depths* shows, finally, that O'Neill, using a structure and a group of characters very similar to Gorky's, has come out with a weaker play. The values of *The Iceman* are, in the last analysis, those of negation. Not for a moment would one wish to recast O'Neill in Gorky's mold; one has too much respect for his skilful handling of

dramatic action, his powerful symbolism, his penetrating psychological study. O'Neill's best dramatic writing will top Gorky's any day; but his best is not in *The Iceman*. Compare it, for example, with an earlier and less ambitious play of O'Neill's own, the satirical *Marco Millions*. Here O'Neill presented the conflict between idealism in the persons of Kublai Khan and his daughter Kukachin, and materialism in the person of Marco. Through Kukachin's death, idealism was apparently defeated; but, without question, the dramatist stood on the side of idealism against Marco's Babbitry. The values of the play were clear and positive, presented with dramatic force.

The pipe dreams of *The Iceman*, of course, cannot be equated with Kukachin's idealism; these illusions, far from the faith that moves mountains, represent the excuses that people make to themselves for failing to face reality. The fact remains that *The Iceman*, though a more searching play than *Marco*, lacks *Marco*'s dramatic vitality because no positive value is presented. Death is the only answer to the problems of life. One might label the play a symptom of post-war despair, comparable to the existentialism of Sartre, had O'Neill not dated it so plainly 1939.

One who looks back with delight to that fall of 1929 when the town of Quincy welcomed the new dynamic *Strange Interlude*, which Boston had cast out, can only hope that *The Iceman*, with its despondent negativism, is only an "interlude" and not the final chapter in O'Neill's career as America's leading dramatist.

Ends and Means in Composition for Adults¹

LEROY H. BUCKINGHAM²

I SHOULD like, if I may, to consider a very sobering assemblage—more impressive than a phalanx of board members, more daunting than an audience of English teachers—and that is the first meeting of an adult class. These people—for they are human beings, not geniuses or case studies or little budding flowers—vary tremendously in backgrounds and interests. Clearly, the goal of a minimum standard of performance is out of the question, and the real problem is to help each one start from where he is, semiliterate or semiprofessional in level, to move toward the broad objectives which all have in common. They may cover a few yards or a thousand miles, and by different routes, but it will be in the same direction, across the same country of the mind, guided by the same stars.

In these remarks I shall have to disregard our work in mechanics and grammar, and also that in vocationally oriented fields like business correspondence, and concentrate upon writing which comes, through whatever transmutations, from individual experience, actual or imaginative, and which one treats in his own way to elicit some kind of emotional response. Although this is commonly called "creative writing" and often given as a separate course, it bulks large in most composition courses, so that many instructors teach creative

writing as unknowingly as Molière's bourgeois gentleman spoke prose.

Another limitation is that this discussion has to take things up one at a time, whereas, in writing, the activities take place simultaneously. Though I must proceed in an analytical, uncreative way, creation is by nature synthetic, and I hope that you will help by thinking of its elements as going on pretty much at the same time, like the two hundred and forty-one aspects of reading or the montage shots in a motion picture.

It seems to me, then, that there are three general aspects of this work: the choice of subject, the treatment of that subject, and the results achieved. Or, to put it another way: What to write about? How to write it? and Where have we got? And the answer to the first contains within it the answers to the other two; indeed, the choice of a subject will have to take up most of our time, because it involves the activities, attitudes, and purposes which run through all the rest of the work.

To begin with, in our most heterogeneous groups there is at least some common purpose. In varying ways and degrees they all want to learn to write better, and the course must try to establish some common activity on individual levels, related to both the general and the individual goals. This, with the all-important establishment of an atmosphere of friendship and interest, is the main job of the first meeting—and, in truth, of all the meetings. To be personal and practical, I find that the best initial project is a scene from the students' past experience,

¹ A paper read at the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English, November 25-27, 1948, at Chicago.

² The Cooper Union, New York City.

prefaced by an explanation that such experience is the basis of all writing, that their own experience *does* have elements of dramatic interest to others, and that ability to write this kind of anecdote will be highly valuable in whatever type of writing they wish to do. Then I pass out mimeographed copies of brief, one-scene accounts of episodes which really did occur, and which occurred within five to ten minutes. These anecdotes are student work in response to the same type of assignment in previous classes. Incidentally, it is most helpful if the students can have before them as much as possible of the material read in class.

Now this use of illustrative material, I know, is frowned upon by many who get splendid results by other means, a fact which proves that creative writing calls for creative, individual teaching. I find that *for me* an ounce of demonstration is worth a pound of explanation, but it must be handled with care. Only in a very general sense is anything to be taken as a model; it is a demonstration of principles of method—methods of selection, arrangement, emphasis, and the like. Copying of subject matter, of thought, of emotional tone must be deprecated vigorously and often, for the literary ideal expressed in sedulous aping has no place in our work. The attitude is always: "This may show you how to do what *you* want to do."

Together we read a very few of these sketches, differing as widely as possible in subject and style and varying in mood from bitter to gay to tender; and as we talk them over we do not fail to point out weaknesses as well as strengths. One of last year's showed a child encountering racial discrimination for the first time, another a rebellious boy becoming reconciled to his mother, another a young

flyer making himself go up again after witnessing a gruesome accident.

Written preferably in the third person for objectivity, this exercise seems to be the best springboard. The best incidents are those without unusual events or feelings, for the aim is to show that the ordinary living of ordinary people is full of moments which, even if literally presented, have the conflict which means dramatic interest and the general applicability—and general truth—which means significance and feeling.

As to conflict, it is easy to get agreement that without it, even though muted, there is no point—really no story, for a story is *trouble*. As to meaning, it must be emphasized, in various aspects, from beginning to end of the course. A writer has to know exactly what he wants to say if he is to communicate it, directly or indirectly; so he must first know what the real or imagined event or place or person means to him, and he must know how he feels about it. Fuzziness and blankness of thought and emotion, as we know too well, are the real causes of poor expression on every level.

A discussion of this kind, beginning with the incidents just read and going on to a number of others briefly outlined, ends by bringing forth suggestions for further ones from the class. Once the ice is broken, they are likely to come rather rapidly. "What does it mean? How do you feel about it?" are constantly asked. When the majority has made some contribution, it is time to channel the activity into writing. Suddenly presenting everyone with pencil, paper, and a brisk suggestion that he write half a page summarizing an incident that *he* might like to write will cause some shocked gasps but, if the build-up has been adequate, only a few casualties. These can be restored to life during the ten minutes

while the others are writing if the teacher goes around with a few leading questions as restoratives. Usually the best questions are those based on theme, such as "Did you ever see somebody show hypocrisy? Or self-sacrifice? Or did you ever see somebody show a struggle within himself?"

When everybody has something to write about, and the first and worst terror—the blank paper that jeers, "How are you going to start?"—has been overcome, a few anonymous samples are read aloud—unless, by previous direction, they have been marked "confidential." This reading is in the interest of further clarification, of creating the group spirit, and of preventing attitudes of shyness and withdrawal.

Some such procedure as this, which of course can be very greatly modified, has some negative values that are no less real than the positive ones. It does away with the idea that a story is something imaginary, made up out of whole cloth by a professional dreamer. It disposes of the idea that a story is necessarily anything like the "good story" that people tell each other or print in gossip columns because of its surprisingness. By making a step toward greater awareness of one's own life, it helps one to see a series of dramas in the quiet texture of everyday living and eliminates the complaint—even more disastrous for successful living than for successful writing—that "nothing interesting ever happens to me!" And, finally, it makes clear, even on this elementary level, the difference in emotional and intellectual value between something that one really means and feels and the usual account of a vacation trip or an embarrassing moment.

Eventually the rough outlines are taken home, to be expanded into finished drafts, or perhaps thrown away in favor

of something better. In short, it is an *assignment*—a word of dread in creative circles. Yet even the most self-willed and "artistic" student—even among freshmen in art school in Greenwich Village—does not rebel against the restriction that he present in any effective way five minutes of all the minutes that he has lived. On the contrary, the "assignment" is very generally welcomed as a step toward better *self-expression* when its design is made clear—a sharpening and focusing that will help him in his self-selected purpose. Even if he plans to write articles, he will constantly need to use such incidents, and their relationship to poetry, the essay, and other forms is even more obvious. Furthermore, he realizes that this is one of the exercises through which he can acquire the literary techniques which he usually very consciously wants.

A send-off of some kind is especially needed by adults who are out of the habit of writing and who have long been away from school, where composition is a regular activity.

On the other hand, it should be made abundantly clear that, now and hereafter, additional writing of any and all kinds will be welcomed with open arms. Many students have a definite interest in a single field. The instructor is usually wise to try to get them to attempt other fields, for their own benefit, as the class takes up different forms, and often they do so with very happy results; but anything should be cordially received at any time.

Particularly at the beginning of a course many students come in with one or two pet ideas. Have them written up by all means, as soon as possible, while the urge is there. Whether they are good or not, in terms of the student's own abilities and purposes, they will at least start

the wheels rolling, establish the instructor's receptiveness, and release the partly solidified accumulation which may inhibit further creative expression.

The initial observed scene has a number of further possibilities. It may be expanded into a story, play, or essay; it may be abbreviated into a poem; it may be combined with other events and settings, or utterly transmuted by imagination. But, whatever type of writing is used, the problem is to find something, either imaginative or literal, that the student knows and feels and that he can express with some satisfaction of achievement. Any number of ways of getting started have been described in print. Even those originally used with children may be very helpful with adults, if classroom common sense is used and if the work is carefully presented and motivated; for adults need more explanation and drawing together than pupils who are used to the procedures of the school.

Giving a topic sentence to start off the imagination is one device that works with children and with their parents. A bit of dialogue to start, a real or imagined newspaper item, a description of a place—all these may grow into substantial pieces. A good send-off for stories and plays is the situation, what I call the "just suppose." For example: "Just suppose that a cultured, intelligent refugee from Europe comes to stay with humble relatives in the United States," or "Just suppose that a newly married couple find themselves caring for three unfamiliar small children," or "Just suppose that you were suddenly twins."

One of the best methods begins with character. Select a person and list a number of unrelated items about him—personality traits, activities, past history, appearance, everything. Do the same for another person, or two others. Soon a

situation involving them will begin to emerge, the main trait of each will become clear, and we are on our way to a scene, perhaps a complete plot. This works well with class groups of four or five, with the instructor going from group to group and asking questions to stimulate imaginative detail. Using pictures clipped from magazines or written descriptions of persons, objects, and situations and having them drawn at random adds to the fun and the inventiveness.

Still another effective beginning is the idea. After reading stories and discussing their themes, give in general terms the theme (that is, the meaning) which is to be conveyed by the story or play to be written—a meaning which of course should not be beyond the students' experience and comprehension. This also leads naturally into essay writing.

The methods of getting started are almost endless. There are a few rather general principles of handling them which I feel fairly sure about. For one thing, try to get the student to do something—anything—in class, at least in the early meetings. Later, more and more can be left to home writing. The student should first be sure of his meaning and attitude. Then if he can rough out a short summary, good; if he can write the opening paragraph, better. He may and perhaps should throw them away, but he has made that first step with which the longest journey begins.

For another thing, the instructor should help, or have the group help, just enough to bring this about, and no more. The author must consider this as *his* job; if he feels that it is being done to someone else's specifications, creative growth is impossible.

Again, writing should be done straight through, if possible. Encouraging stu-

dents to forge ahead while they have a full head of steam, and *then* to go back and revise, will prevent timorous fussing with words while the over-all picture fades and the creative drive is lost.

Furthermore, the study of published writing and student writing should be so handled as to bring out, among other things, ways in which each one may similarly find material in his own thought and experience. Though this is perilously close to the "reading for creative inspiration" which others have decried, my students have found that it has quickened the springs of inspiration rather than dried them up or turned them into some other writer's channels.

Finally, many students like to keep the standard writer's notebook. Those who do will often be able to cash in on their jottings of ideas, situations, bits of dialogue, character-descriptions, phrases that come into their minds, and the like. Indirectly, too, the notebook aids the habits of noticing things, of seeing something in them, and of expressing them while they are fresh.

Stimulants such as these I have mentioned will be administered as needed throughout the course, while—as writing begets writing, as habits and attitudes develop—the task of finding a subject becomes less arduous.

Gradually the emphasis can shift to matters of treatment. As the teacher answers questions in the first part of the hour, as he reads student manuscripts for his own comments and the class's, and as he gives more direct instruction, he can direct attention to whatever element of presentation the group most needs. Adults require a good deal of explanation and repetition, and it will tax one's ingenuity to find fresh angles of attack and fresh material to prevent bore-

dom. If short exercises are inventively and pleasantly presented and if their usefulness in all fields of writing is brought out, they will be done with good will and good results.

The element of style is perhaps the most interesting to adults and the most immediately rewarding. The specific, evocative detail can be recognized by everyone and achieved, after some practice, by surprisingly many. Characterizing a person or a place in a few words of description is a typical beginning project—often assisted by pictures. Another is to rewrite a dull, vague narrative passage to bring it alive by details of dialogue, setting, gesture, appearance, and the like. Another is to observe a person, an animal, a street corner—anything—for five minutes and then to render it with the details that will create unmistakably the dominant impression. Later, imagined persons and scenes may be used.

Every teacher employs many of these devices and many others to develop vividness in wording, such as the usual making of a list of synonyms for general words such as "go" or "say," but if writing is vivid in observed detail, it is likely to be vivid in wording too.

Brief exercises, presented as exercises—like the others of which I speak—are pedagogically defensible, I believe, if they are treated like calisthenics, valuable for the power they give for one's own uses.

Originality and freshness of phrasing, again, is allied to vividness and may be handled in the same way. Here specimens of legalistic gobbledegook and the fine cliché collections of Mr. Arbuthnot, Frank Sullivan's cliché expert, have done yeoman service as horrible examples. If, in trying to avoid jargon and dulness, the inexperienced fall into exaggeration,

into lushness or grotesqueness, let us not be discouraged but rather take heart at this sign of growth.

But rather than develop this further, I should like to synthesize these three elements of style—definiteness, vividness, and freshness—into a fourth, which is partly stylistic and partly structural, namely, economy. Indeed, since style and structure are almost indissolubly related aspects of the treatment of a subject, they may be more strongly and more consciously combined now in the students' minds. To sharpen this perception, two projects have worked reasonably well for me. The first is the "candid snapshot," as it has been called, a tiny vignette of not over fifty words, which strives for a total effect by sharpness of impact. Here the details and the words *have* to be the right ones, rigorously selected to function as parts of the whole. Here are three—two primarily dramatic and one descriptive and considerably longer, done for a different assignment:

The monotonous, foul words from the next room shook the boy awake. His mother had been drinking. After a long time she went to sleep. He heard his father coming toward his room. He shut his eyes tightly against the sudden harsh light. He must not let this father know he had heard.

The repairman had to move his whole body to look up from the broken typewriter. "So after the smash-up I spent three years flat on my back. Neck in a cast. So I had time to watch flies and think. Lots. So now I don't give a damn if I never make a nickel. Just my health, that's enough."

We always use both names for Grace. One name could never cover all of Gracie Viola. She's as tall as—well, tall enough—and as wide as—say, I'm not knocking the girl; I'm just telling you. Anyway, she's got a disposition like a merry-go-round. That hair reminds you of a

brass tuba, and boy! the music goes round and round, and it comes out of Gracie. Any time you plan a good party, Gracie Viola will put on her big red earrings and paint her little red mouth to match, and away you'll go with a wave of the hand. "Hi, Kid!"—that's Gracie.

Another project that emphasizes style and also requires arrangement in a design for a unified effect is the writing of free verse. By apparently casual reading and discussion, classes can be gradually led into verse-writing without falling victim to the fear that besets strong men at the sight of a page with an uneven right-hand margin. Imagist verse offers a good beginning, and students are often amazed and pleased to find that their little "snapshots," chiefly those of places, can be read as free verse. Most of them will produce several efforts and enjoy the novelty of being "poets." In this connection I stress the short free-verse poem (the cinquain being a good example) because the difficulties of meter and rhyme tend to create discouragement. In free verse the writer is able to concentrate on style, selection, and arrangement. Imagery, too, comes into play, stimulating the mind to see significances and symbols. Poetry is, in part, symbols and imagery; in part, the connotations and associations of words; in part, sound-values and rhythms. Poetry is concentration, and poetry is a singleness of feeling. Since all these are elements of creative prose as well, it is no wonder that we sometimes feel that we can best teach prose through poetry.

I have mentioned the detailed study of structure in the short sketch and the poem; but of course it must be dealt with for all forms. Rather than prescribe principles, we shall do well to let the principles evolve, with a deft nudge here and there, from the student's own work.

But let us imagine that we are at the end of the course or unit, that the students have done their incidental exercises and have found subjects and given them expression for the main work, their own work. Their manuscripts have received written comments from the instructor, primarily as creative efforts to be evaluated encouragingly but justly in terms of the individual's own purposes and progress—and secondarily, if necessary, for mechanics and the like, with whatever group or individual help the situation allows. Some of the manuscripts have been corrected, others perhaps rewritten, always with the intent of achieving better expression and communication. We hope that there have been at least a few brief conferences. And the instructor's relationship with the students, and theirs with each other, has been cordial and personal.

By this time, too, those who expected to become professional writers have realized that the road is long and uncertain. This is not to say that they may not succeed, but they have come to a more accurate appraisal of the situation.

What more important gains may we expect? I recently asked the question of an advanced adult class, and one suggested that nobody who writes is ever bored. The others agreed whole-heartedly. They feel that they have gained in powers of expression, and they find greater happiness in creating. Creation also brings release; two of the students assured me that they consciously work off their problems and resentments by writing about characters with the same problems—one of them concerned politics, I

recall, and another the multifarious conflicting claims made upon the modern wife and mother.

This objectification of experience has other aspects too. When one girl remarked that playing God was good for the ego, she was flippantly pointing out that the writer creates a unified, ordered, reasonable world. Going further, I would suggest that this implies a revaluation of the past experience upon which even fiction is based, and a deeper understanding of character and of life. In this connection it was heartening to hear these people agree that understanding their fictional characters had made them more tolerant personally and more liberal socially.

They mentioned the precision that the discipline of writing imposes, the sharpened perceptions, the sense of drama and meaning in life, and the craftsman's insight into literature—the growth in critical power and taste which Professor Cleanth Brooks regards as the chief value of writing courses and which gladdens my heart when students say reproachfully: "You know, you've spoiled the movies for me!"

Yes, I was very much pleased with my class for giving me the answers I needed. But best of all I liked the lady who concluded by admitting: "Really, the biggest thing is that now I can hold my own against my husband's golf."

But whatever their motives for coming, we want them to keep coming to our classes, and I think you will join with me in feeling that we are privileged to engage in a task that is not the least worthy one in education.

Occam's Razor and Sophomore Poetry

ARTHUR M. EASTMAN¹

I HAVE been told about a back-country English teacher. She was elderly, unmarried, and with a passion for poetry. When she read to her class, she darkened the room; lit pale candles; left for a moment, to return in black habiliments; and then, after a pause, intoned the lyric.

I sometimes think that my sophomore students first tasted poetry from her spoon. At the first sip all the husky young males retched and so did the husky young females. Those who didn't got a warm glow in their tummies, and, though they didn't quite get the taste, they liked the glow. Whenever they discussed the taste, the old lady told them what the taste really was. If a young lad said huckleberries, the old lady said it was lavender and roses. They might debate the point, but the end was inevitable: lavender and roses. And so they come to me and to the legions of other instructors throughout the land, hating poetry for its effeminacy or loving it for its emotional voltage, convinced either way that interpretation is private and, in a classroom, arbitrary.

To overcome these prejudices is our task. If we are manly, we may, by our examples, induce the husky sophomore to taste again. If we explicate well, we may induce the glowers to correlate glow with meaning to obtain illumination. But we can do neither of these unless we first excise from the student's mind two delusions. The first is the conviction that

everyone has a right to his own interpretation. It has as its unperceived, but influential, consequence the notion that every interpretation is as good as every other. The second is that only the teacher can interpret. Its consequence is sickly imitation or sullen rebellion. Both delusions, I think, can be cut away with the delicate edge of Occam's razor.

William of Occam, *doctor invicibilis*, was a fourteenth-century English schoolman whose razor was the principle of parsimony: *Essentia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem*: "Entities must not be unnecessarily multiplied." Bertrand Russell has paraphrased the principle as follows: "If everything in some science can be interpreted without assuming this or that hypothetical entity, there is no ground for assuming it." In writing, Occam's razor has been the means of shearing away excess verbiage; it is the teacher's blue pencil, wielded in the belief that, unless there is strong reason to the contrary, the simplest way of saying a thing is best. In the reading of poetry the razor is the means of pruning away unnecessary complication of interpretation: of various interpretations that explain the data of a poem, the simplest is best. And in the teaching of poetry it is a means of ridding a student of inhibitory delusions. Let me illustrate the last two points from the classroom.

At the University of Michigan the introductory course in literature contains three weeks on short stories, three on novels, and nine on poems. During the

¹ University of Michigan.

first six weeks the students are moderately pliant. They like stories, they like novels; they have a happy faith that they know how to "read." But when they begin the final nine weeks, rigidity tends to supplant the earlier pliancy, and the delusions of which I have spoken begin to manifest themselves. In an effort to smooth the student's way, our department has conventionally begun its study of poetry with ballads, despairingly hoping that the carry-over of narrative interest will keep the student susceptible of improvement. But the trouble begins even with the ballads, even with the first stanza of the first ballad that they are assigned.

My students begin with "Sir Patrick Spens":

The king sits in Dumferling toun,
Drinking the blude-reid wine:
"O what will I get guid sailor,
To sail this schip of mine?"

Between one-fourth and one-third of the class immediately proclaim that the king is a sot. Now the problem is not to prove these miscreants wrong but to correct them without fertilizing their delusions. The teacher may resort to the historical approach and point out that wine was the common drink in the Scotland of many centuries ago. This will do the trick, but the delusions will begin to burgeon. Since not all the students are the children of teetotalers, the teacher can ask one whether his parents have ever taken a sip of wine. If the answer is Yes, he can then ask whether the parents are sots. Usually this will do the trick without benefit to the delusions, for it appeals to the student's own experience. (If the student says his parents *are* sots, however, it is best to turn rapidly to another ballad.) A third alternative is open to the teacher, however; he can here begin to use Occam's razor. Cer-

tainly, some students will infer, not that the king is alcoholic, but that he is simply having casual refreshment, as, in another age, he might take afternoon tea. Both interpretations include all the data; which is simpler? The second, of course, for the first has to assume data that are not essential: a blood-red nose over the blood-red wine, continued drinking, etc. The value of the appeal to the razor here would not be in its resolution of the problem of interpretation—that could have been solved by either of the other methods proposed. The value would be in proposing to the student a principle he can use for himself. And there will be room for its further use before the poem is done.

A few stanzas later, after Sir Patrick has read the king's letter, the ballad shifts to dramatic dialogue:

- 18 "O wha is this has don this deid,
 This ill deid don to me,
 To send me out this time o' the yeir,
 To sail upon the se!"
- 20 "mak hast, mak hast, my mirry men all,
 Our guid schip sails the morn."
- 22 "O say na sae, my master deir,
 For I feir a deadlie storme."
- 24 "Late late yestreen I saw the new moone,
 Wi the auld moone in hir arme,
 And I feir, I feir, my deir master,
 That we will cum to harme."

Three interpretations of lines 21–28 are promptly forthcoming: first, and correct, that Sir Patrick speaks lines 21–22 to his crew, and a crewman replies in lines 23–28; second, that Sir Patrick speaks lines 21–22 to his crew and lines 23–28 to the king; third, that the king speaks lines 21–22 to Sir Patrick's crew, and Sir Patrick replies in lines 23–28. Here immediately the teacher can use the principle already assumed by Occam's razor, that the correct interpretation must rest on evidence, on all the evidence. Gen-

erally, a good class can supply at least a good deal of evidence in support of the second and third interpretations. The rapid transitions, already manifested in the early stanzas of the ballad, warrant the assumption of another transition here: if lines 21-22 are thought to be Sir Patrick's address to his men, then the transition follows these lines and presents the knight at Dumferling; if these lines are credited to the king, then the transition precedes them: the king has come to the beach to oversee the embarkation and then exhorts the crew to haste. The word "master" is referred to the king, who is, indeed, Sir Patrick's master; and the fear and the omen of the new moon in the old moon's arms are the reasons the tears blinded Sir Patrick's "ee" when he received the letter.

The teacher could appeal at this point to the quotation marks, which show that the speaker of lines 21-22 is the same as the speaker of the preceding stanza. Half the opposition, however, would feel that this was below the belt, and at least one would perceive that the quotation marks themselves are but the editor's indication of *his* interpretation. Moreover, the question of lines 23-28 would remain. The teacher cannot appeal here to the student's own experience; he cannot use the historical approach; but once again he can lead the student to the best interpretation by appeal to Occam's razor: the first is the simplest; the others multiply details unnecessarily and assume what need not be assumed. And once again the value of the appeal is less in the resolution of the interpretational problem than in providing the student with a reliable tool of interpretation.

My own experience has been that students take to the razor easily. It has an aura of the scientific (supported, be it

noted, by such terms as "data" and "evidence"), and they have faith in science. It appeals to reason, and reason is neither effeminate nor private nor arbitrary. It provides rules to a game that has been played before without rules. It provides a court of final appeal other than vocal volume, a show of hands (democratic delusions persist), or the teacher's verdict. Some of my own students like it, I find, because they can hale me before that court as easily as I can them. We are both subordinate to its law.

And, as the students master the principle, they master the idea that interpretation depends on the evidence within the poem. (It may, of course, rely on other evidence as well: e.g., "Milton on His Blindness"; but the reader has to begin with the poem itself and work out.) Students then begin to read for evidence, to check one piece of evidence against another. The time comes when, in considering Browning's "Last Duchess," a careless student will interpret the following lines to mean that the Duke *asked* his last Duchess not to smile so freely:

... This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together.

Then the class, not the teacher, points to the earlier line, "I choose never to stoop," and to the context, which defines "stoop" to mean just such verbal correction as the careless student has proposed. As they master the razor, they gain faith and encouragement from their own success. And they surrender, slowly but, as they are to be saved, surely, the delusions that everyone has a right to his own interpretation; that every interpretation is as good as every other; that poetry is irrational, effeminate, arbitrary; that only the teacher can interpret.

A Philosophy for Teacher Education¹

G. R. CARLSEN²

THE Committee on Teacher Education of the National Council of Teachers of English has been working during the past year on a statement of beliefs to serve as a guide in its work of setting up recommendations for a teacher-education program. Since the members of the committee were not in perfect agreement, I am presenting a majority report, knowing full well that many of you will want to question or object to part of it just as the committee did. My statement may serve as a straw man to be knocked down in order to find a real man later.

In our thinking about teacher-training, we certainly begin by assuming that a teacher can be developed from a college-aged young person by carefully guiding him through selected experiences. Of course, we all know individuals without any formal training who are better teachers than people with doctorate degrees. Nevertheless, we know that the general level of teaching in America is better as a result of rigid certification requirements. Many school systems recognize the validity of training by making a salary differential for the Master's degree. We have also heard the common complaints of many teachers during their first years that they need help both with information and with methods for achieving given ends with students. And through painful trial-and-error procedures all of us have changed and sharp-

ened our teaching methods and achieved our results more effectively than we did as beginners. In spite of critics who say a teacher is born and not made, no one has been able to discover really distinguishing characteristics between the good and the poor teacher. Many people with many differing characteristics somehow succeed as a result of reacting to their experiences. And so we feel that the ability to teach can be learned if our training program is correctly organized.

The committee in general believes that the experiences given to the trainee should be designed and conducted in harmony with the philosophy of education which we want students to accept. Certainly one of the most persistent and valid objections of students to colleges of education is that professors do not exemplify what they teach. In nicely rounded lectures students learn not to overuse the lecture technique. In traditional examinations, they express their doubts about the traditional examination. Furthermore, we know the essential truth of the old cliché that teachers teach as they have been taught. Last summer, for the first time in my life, I taught a course completely outside the areas in which I had had work. I realized then how dependent I have been on the precedent set by my own instructors. In this situation I felt lost and uncertain, for I was brought painfully to the problems of considering how best to help students learn. But even in this situation, I adapted methods that I had found personally stimulating in courses I had

¹ A paper read at the annual convention of the National Council of Teachers of English held November 25-27, 1948, at Chicago.

² University of Colorado.

taken. I remember how shocked faculty and students were a few summers ago when William H. Kilpatrick taught a course at the University of Minnesota using a group-method approach. After seeing such a course in action, other professors began to break from the usual lecture-recitation pattern.

It can, of course, be argued that it is not fair to impose a philosophy of education on teachers. At present, however, almost all preparatory courses are taught from a single educational viewpoint—an essentialistic one of lecture, recitation, examination. If we are to strive to let students develop their own philosophies, we are certainly called upon to expose them to courses springing from many philosophies of education: the progressive, the essentialist, the reconstructionist, and the perennialist.

I still frankly favor an out-and-out designing of preparatory courses in harmony with the point of view about education that we want students to accept. I feel about this problem of letting a teacher choose a philosophy the way Coleridge did. He showed a friend a garden of weeds. The friend expressed surprise, to which Coleridge replied calmly: "I am letting the soil have a taste of everything so that it can freely choose without prejudice what it wants to grow."

The majority of members of the committee are willing to agree that experience, through which we believe we can develop a teacher, involves something more than the traditional lecture-recitation pattern of most college classes today. We have not discussed as yet what we do mean by experience, but I suspect the definition will lie in the direction of Dewey's "a warm and intimate taking in of the full scope of a situation." Operationally this will mean a procedure in

classroom learning in which individuals and groups identify problems and questions, analyze their present knowledge and understanding, and then, through reading, observing, trying, and failing, find a tentative solution. Thus in a freshman English course, students might attempt to discover the kinds of language activities they will need in their college classes, in their chosen vocational fields, and in their personal lives. Then they might test themselves to discover how well they already perform these activities. Finally, through the study of successful and unsuccessful performances, through the use of textbooks, they would attempt to win through to new skill. In such a situation teachers would have to use some sort of group organization within the framework of the class, for certain activities would be peculiar to the needs of only four or five students. One sees such an operational concept of experience in the student teaching programs of most of our schools of education, but seldom in the academic classrooms. It is interesting that our prospective teachers usually find their student teaching the most vital and exciting part of their preparatory work.

Such thinking about the job of preparing teachers leads the committee to feel that methodology and subject matter must be considered simultaneously in all preparatory work. How students are taught must be considered simultaneously with what they are taught.

We believe unanimously that a teacher's education must include experiences in three areas—which overlap, to be sure. These areas are his personal and social life as a citizen in an American democracy (the general education of students), his professional life as a worker in the American schools (the professional education), and his specific voca-

tional life as an expert in the teaching of the language arts (his specific education).

The committee is not prepared to state what pattern of education will contribute most directly to enriching the life of the individual or to helping him function as a competent democratic person in his society. To date colleges and universities have looked at general education in terms of what bodies of knowledge or information people should possess. Consequently, they have set up their course on the basis of content to be covered. The traditional survey courses of all departments or the hundred-books courses are examples of such procedure. And yet I feel that information and knowledge are not power. I should like to see us inquire rather into what people should do than into what they should know to live rich personal lives—and from such a viewpoint design our general-education courses.

In most colleges of education the professional education of the teacher is carried on through a discussion of the American school system, the philosophy of education, and the curriculum during the junior year. We have assumed that transmitting a body of fact will carry over into performance. To break away from this pattern, we are trying an apprentice-training period of one quarter at the University of Colorado. Students are sent to the Denver schools for a full day's work. They carry on all the activities of the regular teacher with teachers' meetings, PTA meetings, and club activities. They follow students through a full day's work to gain insight into the total curriculum rather than merely into the language-arts program. The results in giving students a feeling of the job of a teacher as a professional worker have exceeded our expectations. In many places a full fifth year of such training is being considered.

The committee feels further that the development of all three facets of the teacher's life should be continuous throughout both the training period and his life. At present we give the student his general education during his first two years and his professional education during the last two. The committee believes that any rigid division of training on this basis is a denial of the principles of learning. Such a pattern is inclined to compartmentalize further the thinking of teachers about their lives and about their jobs. We do not object to an emphasis on general education in the first years and on professional education in the last if the other is not completely excluded in either case. It would seem sensible for all students in their first years of college to study something about American institutions, among which would be a consideration of the American school system—a subject at present studied only by education majors. Also, in the general-education program students should do some sort of vocational exploration. Within such a framework prospective teachers might well visit classrooms, talk with teachers, and read something about the job and life of a teacher, while others are doing the same things in the fields of engineering, medicine, law, nursing, or commercial designing. On the other hand, the program of the last two years should allow an occasional excursion into fields unrelated to teaching as a job. My own training was a series of minor frustrations because my senior and graduate programs could not include subjects like anthropology, which I discovered during my senior year, or ceramics, which I wanted simply for my own enjoyment. Our neglect of students' personal enrichment is expressed in their frequent complaint that they never can read a book for pleasure during their last years in college.

In all courses the committee's ultimate objective will be to design a program to stimulate a person to continue growing. Thus we cannot assume that general education or professional education can be accomplished during a given period of students' college experience and henceforth forgotten.

Finally, the committee believes that the psychological constitution of students rather than the logic of subject matter forms the basis for designing a course of study. Such a concept might force us to a rearrangement of the order of our courses. Logically, it seems that students should start with principles and proceed to practices based on principles. Thus, we begin education courses with the American school system, the psychology of learning, the philosophy of education, and the high-school curriculum and take up methods and student teaching last. In designing lesson plans, we insist that students state objectives then proceed to specific aims and finally to activities. And yet I have often discovered that I usually work the other way around. I find that my objectives crystallize from experience rather than experience coming from objectives. In many of my own units I have taught things several times before I was clearly aware of what I was striving to do. Then in the light of such clarity I could sharpen the direction of the course. Recently, I inverted the pattern in my methods of teaching English classes. I had in the past begun with the objectives of English teaching. I discovered that my students began the course after my two weeks' introduction. And so I changed the order, beginning with specific methods and procedures and ending with objectives during the last weeks of the course, a change that has proved itself.

It was my experience as it was yours, I am sure, that graduate work following actual teaching made infinitely better sense than did undergraduate courses. If such a principle is psychologically true of the learning of students, we might consider the desirability of having specific methods and student-teaching courses in the junior year and general courses in the curriculum and philosophy the senior year. Such a suggestion is merely an illustration of the kind of changes that might be effected by considering the psychological constitution of the student and how he learns instead of considering only the logical organization of subject matter.

To recapitulate, these are the eight statements of belief that the Committee on Teacher Education proposes for a guiding philosophy.

1. The qualities making for a desirable teacher can be developed and enhanced through a training program of carefully selected and guided experiences.
2. Such experiences should be selected and conducted in harmony with the philosophy of education we want teachers to accept.
3. The term experience involves something more than the traditional lecture-recitation pattern of most college classes today.
4. A broader definition of experience implies that methodology must be considered simultaneously with subject matter.
5. The experiences we design for teachers fall into three areas: (a) his personal and social life as a citizen in an American democracy, (b) his professional life as a worker in the American school system, and (c) his specific vocational life as an expert in the language arts.
6. Growth in each of these three areas must be continuous.
7. The ultimate objective of the training program should be to turn out individuals capable of continued growth.
8. The psychological constitution of the student and how he learns rather than solely the internal logic of subject matter is the basis for designing a course of study.

Current English Forum

HAROLD B. ALLEN, ADELINE C. BARTLETT, MARGARET M. BRYANT (*chairman*)
JAMES B. McMILLAN, KEMP MALONE, RUSSELL THOMAS

EXPECT—RIGHT

Expect (for *suppose*) and *right* (temporal) are always under fire from handbooks and purists. But they have some support from linguists and more from literature.

In the Leonard survey, "I expect he knows his subject" has a rating of 120: disputable; and, without the weighted votes of the linguists, the rating by all the judges is 144, even more disputable. Marckwardt and Walcott call it "Colloquial English." So does the *ACD*, which uses "colloquial," as Marckwardt and Walcott do, for acceptable familiar English. Or as Professor Kittredge did, when he said, "I speak Colloq. and often write it." The *Standard*, on the other hand, calls *expect* in this sense a colloquial solecism and adds: "*Expect* is very widely misused both in England and in the United States for *think*, *suppose*, *believe*, also for *suspect*. . . . *Expect* refers to the future, usually with the implication of interest or desire." The *NED* says: ". . . is often cited as an Americanism, but is very common in dialectal, vulgar, or carelessly colloquial speech in England." Its quotations, however, come from such respectable sources as Tourneur and Jefferson.

It is my unscientific impression that the usage is far more common today in British writing (neither dialectal nor vulgar and not conspicuously careless) than in American writing. I have just found it in Galsworthy, Humphrey Pakington, Nevil Shute, Elizabeth Bowen, and E. M. Forster—hardly contemptible or even negligible names. But I have not found it in contemporary American writing. Now, as Professor Knott used to shock students by saying when they mentioned the split infinitive in horrified tones, I

use *expect* for *suppose* myself whenever I feel like it, and I often feel like it. So, I observe, do many of my not entirely uncultivated friends and acquaintances. I have been wondering, therefore, why the usage should be taboo in American writing. Perhaps I have found the reason in Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. "Exception is often taken to the sense *suppose*, be inclined to think, consider probable. This extension of meaning is, however, so natural that it seems needless PURISM to resist it. *E.* by itself is used as short for *e. to find*, *e. that it will turn out that*, that is all. . . . The OED remarks that the 'idiom is now rare in literary use'; that is owing to the dead set that has been made at it; but it is so firmly established in colloquial use that if, as suggested above, there is no sound objection to it, the period of exile is not likely to be long." The last sentence is especially soothing to one who once wrote, in a piece of very light verse about the perennial housing shortage, "I expect to be looking for l.h.k. when I die and perhaps when I'm dead," and had *expect* to be changed without notice to *suspect* *I'll be* by a hypersensitive editor.

Right as a temporal adverb has rougher going, oddly enough, with linguists. The Leonard survey sentence, "We went right home," is rated 118 by the linguists but 56 by the whole group of judges. Marckwardt and Walcott call it "American Literary English," and the *ACD* calls *right* (adv.) "Colloq. or Dial." only in the sense of *extremely*, as "I was right glad." Fowler, who is most disturbed by the tendency to use unidiomatic *-ly*, *rightly* for *right*, says of temporal *right* only: "R. away in the sense 'at once,' 'without delay,' comes from Amer-

ica & is still far from comfortable in England." The *Standard* labels "Colloq. U.S." all such phrases as *right away*, *right along*, *right off*, and *right now*. Ah, here we have an Americanism. Or have we?

Two questions arise. The simpler has to do with the precise meaning of *right* in the test sentence. The comments reported by Leonard show some uncertainty. "Each group of judges except linguists and authors placed this among established usages. One British linguist says, 'Incorrect, if *right* means *straight'.*" (Note that *straight* is just what *right* does mean, according to *NED*, adv. 1; see below.) Another linguist called it "good colloquial usage if it means 'the whole way home.'" The rating is probably affected by this uncertainty as to the temporal and spatial shading in *right*; but, in spite of the rating, the final judgment of *Current English Usage* is "probably entirely correct for informal speech."

The second and larger question is whether *right* can ever be a temporal adverb. We may perhaps disregard the problem of semantic shift in general—even die-hard purists cheerfully, though often in ignorant bliss, use such words as *manufacture* and *manure* in senses quite unforeseen by the Romans—and ask only whether we have here, in the transition from the spatial to the temporal adverb, anything more than the sort of natural extension that Fowler claims for *expect*. Note the parallel with *directly*.

Marckwardt and Walcott cite *NED*, adv. 3c, 1849-1901, "U.S." But they overlook *NED*, adv. 1, which quotes, without disapproval or charge of Americanism, not

only Milton ("right onward drove") and George Eliot ("be put into the ladies' compartment and go right on") but *Harper's*, December, 1884 ("I'm going right home now")—for these examples (according to the definition of adv. 1) indicate motion in a straight line. And nothing else? *NED*, adv. 3a, admits the meaning "immediately after some event" with examples from *Orm* to the elder Holmes. Still no derogatory comment. But *NED*, adv. 3b, labels "U.S." the use of *right* to mean "straight (with temporal connotation)." And *NED*, adv. 6, labels "Now archaic" the use of *right* to qualify adverbs or adverbial phrases of time, e.g., *right now*. The quotations run from 888 to 1897. The *NED* position appears to be that a usage acceptable long before 1607 or even 1492 but current only in America today cannot be classed as literary English but must be either archaic or an Americanism. Either term belies the facts.

I have found no later examples of this usage. Undoubtedly, the sort of attack that Fowler blames for the lowly state of *expect* (for *suppose*) is responsible for the outcast state of *right* in a temporal sense. These are not the only usages to arouse a suspicion that educated Americans are more likely to write or to revise with one eye on a handbook and one ear cocked toward echoes of prescriptive teaching than are British writers of equal competence.

Surely, it is also needless PURISM to resist *right* with temporal connotation.

ADELINE C. BARTLETT

HUNTER COLLEGE

Round Table

THE COLLEGE FRESHMAN

"Freshmen," a young instructor once facetiously remarked, "should not be permitted to come to college." Frequently, college professors, wearied by years of theme-reading, adopt this view seriously. They tell o'er again the sad account of similar themes on standardized subjects and moan each fore-bemoaned moan as if every year they expected genuine greatness from the young men and women who enter their classes: clear, alpine streams of thought from mature minds. There is often reason enough for the protest that freshmen are immature, confused, and occasionally downright stupid. Yet the challenge of teaching freshmen lies precisely in the fact that their thinking is *not* clear, their philosophies *not* fully formed, their reading *not* accomplished. They possess only the raw material. What kind of thinking is dormant in it? What can be done with it? That is the responsibility of the college teacher—to answer these questions.

If our students are not supremely gifted, if their educational background is faulty, if they are not widely read, they are, nevertheless, alert young people who have, for the most part, absorbed as much as they were given to absorb. Are we, teachers of freshmen composition, capable of challenging and inspiring them to something better? A college education does little for a young man or woman if it does not arouse a broad curiosity about things and events outside his closed circuit. But how is this intellectual curiosity to be learned from a sarcastic wit, an embittered Ph.D., or a disgruntled instructor? Faith, understanding, and a sense of humor are as vital to the college teacher as is scholarship.

A young man or woman entering college as a freshman lacks—as all of us know—di-

rection and security. The more thoughtful he is, the more unsure he appears, as he tries to understand and use the new instruments college is giving him. His naïveté makes him defenseless. He has not learned to recognize the academic clichés expounded by fellow-students and, alas, instructors, and he is daily awed and frightened by what he believes to be intellectual profundity.

A bored face may conceal intense emotions. Poor work may have a thousand causes—none of them related to intellectual capacity. As an instructor two years ago, I saw a student who had been rebuffed by a previous college instructor gradually gain the respect of fellow-students and the self-assurance that enabled her to sharpen faltering suggestions into sure and intelligent comments. Many of you have had the same experience.

An unfair mark, a sarcastic comment, or a devastating criticism on the part of the instructor may lay the first stone in a wall of hostility not only toward the instructor but, what is of much greater importance, toward the subject itself. The teacher who puts one such stone in place—and how many lay the entire wall!—is not worthy of a college. He has made an error much more serious, in the larger view, than a false reference in a thesis.

Is it too much to say that the majority of freshmen in our liberal-arts colleges write themes that contain at least one of the ingredients of acceptable expression? The careful and sympathetic reader can find some one building block, however cracked, discolored, or, if you will pardon the expression, half-baked, that may be used as a cornerstone. A "yes" or "good" written in the margin at that point *may* make an eager student out of a blundering beginner.

The purpose of college composition courses, after all, is not to confirm already

acknowledged ability but to develop the interested student into a thoughtful and sensitive human being enriched by wide reading, clear self-expression, and the guidance of a vigorous and alert mind. "The profit of our studies," writes Montaigne in his essay *Of the Education of Boys*, "lies in our having become the better and the wiser for them." Before we ask about our students, let us ask about ourselves. Have we college teachers become the better and the wiser for our studies?

REBECCA M. OSBORN

MONTANA STATE COLLEGE

THE REAPPEARANCE OF THE "MERMAID SERIES"

The experience of teachers in the last few years has emphasized the dependence of scholars and students alike upon those public servants essential to a democratic culture, librarians and publishers. A large influx of students has coincided with an equally impressive dearth of books. A few important fields of study in the humanities have even been threatened with desolation by these privations. Many librarians have, nevertheless, met the critical situation with heroic efforts, while a few publishers have unexpectedly and boldly befriended the academic world in such a fashion that teachers should undeniably take notice of their services.

In no field have these conditions been more apparent than in Elizabethan studies. The student of Shakespeare, to be sure, is more likely to suffer from a surfeit of books, good and bad, loading the shelves than from any privation whatsoever. Editions of Donne, Spenser, Herrick, Sidney, Bacon, and the leading nondramatic writers are almost certain to be available. But throughout modern times generally, plays have always raised a problem. As the most elementary student of English literature knows, the incomparably human scenes of Elizabethan drama were all but forgotten until, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, they were rescued by the enthusiasm of Charles Lamb and his friends. Ex-

pensive editions at first limited the range of their public, conferring a peculiar value upon that most popular compilation, Lamb's *Specimens*. A far larger public came first to know the plays through one of the most justly celebrated of all collections of the English classics, the "Mermaid Series," whose first volume, under the general editorship of Havelock Ellis, appeared in 1886. Over a score of playwrights represented in approximately thirty volumes appeared within the next few years. Ellis, being a radical, a master of the new psychology, and a singularly honest and valiant opponent of all Victorian prudery and evasion, insisted throughout on uncensored texts and honest editing. Some of the finest work, both critical and historical, of the late Victorian period appeared in the introductions to these books, which, as many of us will recall, include work by Swinburne, Saintsbury, Symonds, Gosse, Strachey, Hereford, and other hardly less eminent names.

If a class of students in our century was to know the Elizabethan drama through any more attractive medium than an anthology, this series provided the almost certain means. Earlier editions of Dyce and Grosart were directed to the more elegant shelves of British gentlemen. The scholarship, which was generally very good, had been largely accomplished by country clergymen. The new library, on the contrary, was edited by a new group of professional men of letters and addressed to a very much larger and more democratic public. It always sold well in America.

Yet one by one these books went out of print. The present writer vividly recalls visiting the American publishers several times, pleading with them to keep this best loved of all collections of the British classics in active circulation. It was almost unthinkable to me that the results of such an appeal should have been completely negative. The gradual strangulation of the "Mermaid Series" seemed a mark of doom upon the popular success of Elizabethan studies themselves. It was accordingly with mingled feelings of relief and regret that I

myself discontinued a university course in the minor Elizabethan dramatists in favor of other, more readily accessible fields. With increasingly stringent conditions of publication abroad, there seemed small prospect that so large a venture as republication would be undertaken in England, and apparently Americans remained stubbornly unaware of how much was being lost.

But lovers of the most humane movement in all English literature have at present some cause for congratulation. Under the direction of A. A. Wyn, the "Mermaid Series" is rapidly being reissued, a new volume appearing approximately each month. As yet there has been no re-editing, but this may well in time be accomplished, and the texts and introductions of the original volumes are for the most part acceptable today. There are cases in which a glossary would help. It is earnestly to be hoped that no impediment will arise against the republication of the entire series and that it may promptly be enlarged by new titles. Popular editions of dramatists from every century are in demand. There should, for example, be such editions of John Heywood, the master of the Interludes; John Marston, the remarkable Elizabeth dramatic satirist; and the ever delightful Henry Fielding. The works of many playwrights, both English and American, have become classics since Ellis, at the age of twenty-six, began his celebrated venture—Wilde, Pinero, Galsworthy, Coward, Behrman, Howard, Odets, and any number of playwrights coming at once to mind. A volume of early American dramas and one of American musical comedies would be of particular interest. Who shall say from what new waters the immortal Mermaid may emerge?

Meanwhile teachers should take new heart in presenting the older English drama to an ever widening group of students and readers. The intensely human art of Marlowe, Jonson, Chapman, Dekker, Marston, Webster, Middleton, and Congreve and their kin is not, it seems, even yet destined as decoration for the elegant tomb of an exclusive scholarly learning. The very considerable eloquence, spirit, and comic verve

even of the Cavalier school led by Beaumont, Fletcher, Massinger, and Shirley, are to be reckoned with. All these authors, with Milton, are to belong not only to the archives but to the market place and the heat of the day. English teachers who are truly teachers and not devoted exclusively to research may breathe a little more freely on this account. It is a real joy to encounter the living Mermaid again and all the more pleasing to sight this British heroine off American shores. It gives one, indeed, a little of that delectable satisfaction experienced from seeing Beatrice Lillie, in the finest of all her acts, as the glittering Puritan Mermaid of *Inside U.S.A.*

HENRY W. WELLS

THE SCIENTIFIC BIRD

Miss Wingo's "Hark, Hark, the Lark" and Miss Christensen's reply, "From Heaven, or Near It" (*College English*, January and November, 1948), raise the entertaining question of bird poetry and whether it should reveal scientific accuracy of observation.

That unique personality, W. H. Hudson, himself prose-poet and lover of poets, as well as one of the keenest observers who ever gave his life to ornithology, says of William Cowper who wrote *The Task*: "He was as bad a naturalist as any singer before or after him, and as any true poet has a perfect right to be. As bad, let us say, as Shakespeare and Wordsworth and Tennyson" (*Birds and Man*).

Long ago Aristotle remarked in discussing the errors which touch the poetic art: "We may ask whether the fault is one of those essential to the art or is only incidentally connected with it; it is less serious for a painter not to know that a female deer has no horns than to represent one inartistically." I think it a fair conclusion that natural influences on bird poetry are significant but that accuracy of observation, though perhaps desirable, is not of prime importance.

STEWART C. WILCOX

UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

Report and Summary

AN EXPERIMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT of leaders for America's public school system began this fall at Harvard's Graduate School of Education when a group of educators gathered there for a year's study as Education Fellows. Each Fellow will have his own individual study project, and every part of the University will be open to him. The program will operate without any relation to a degree program. The purpose is to give a mature group of men and women in the field of public education an opportunity to fill in their own backgrounds and develop special fields of interest in order to serve better the nation's schools and their own communities. The project is discussed at considerable length by Benjamin Fine in the *New York Times*, September, 11.

THE EXPLICATOR, WHICH FOR SIX years has been a clearing-house for *explication de texte* of English and American literature, has begun a new policy. It now is including a page or two on foreign literatures, both ancient and modern. This will especially help teachers of "general literature." Published eight times a year. Address: Box 3024 Rivermount Station, Lynchburg, Virginia. \$1.50 per year.

LIFE AND LETTERS, THE BRITISH monthly edited by Robert Herring, is devoting alternate issues to discussions of the contemporary literature of individual countries. Thus the January issue was concerned with Chinese literature, April with Irish, August with Italian, and October and December are to deal with those of Sweden and Iran. No claim is made for comprehensiveness, only an attempt to be "tolerably representative, and that within space limits." Teachers of world literature, especially, will find them useful. *Life and Letters* is published in London. Address Brendan Publishing

ing Co., Ltd., 430 Strand. Subscription rate: \$5.00 yearly, postage free.

SIDNEY HOOK, CHAIRMAN OF THE Department of Philosophy, New York University, contributes his measured opinion on the question "What Shall We Do about Communist Teachers?" to the *Saturday Evening Post* (September 10). Assuming belief in the validity of the principles of academic freedom, he first analyzes *in extenso* various aspects of the two questions: Does the evidence warrant the conclusion that members of the Communist party are unfit to teach in American schools? Is the attempt to bar members of the Communist party from our schools more likely to imperil the integrity of the educational process than suffering them to carry on as usual? He presents evidence to show that the answer to the first question is certainly "Yes." To the second he says that the principle should be laid down by educators that membership in the Communist party is *prima facie* evidence of unfitness to teach. But he warns:

Care should be taken to make clear that membership in the Communist party establishes a *prima facie*, not a compelling, case against educational employability. . . . Sensibly interpreted, it means that the principle of dismissal will be applied whenever sufficient evidence of Communist party activity appears on the campus. . . . Administered by elected faculty committees, the principle should be applied from situation to situation with the same discretion that intelligent men apply any kind of rule. But the operating principle should be proclaimed in advance. Such action would make unnecessary legislation like the Feinberg law, recently adopted by the State of New York, which should be repealed.

THE RELATIVE CLAIMS OF HISTORICAL criticism and of purely aesthetic criticism are discussed by J. V. Cunningham in *Poetry* for September under the misleading

title, "The Ancient Quarrel between History and Poetry." Honest interpretation must be trying to understand the author's intention. (How we resent misinterpretation or misreport of what we say!) This requires knowledge of the events and circumstances of the time and also sympathy or love. Mr. Cunningham assumes that the historical critic will be sympathetic. He distinguishes in a footnote between the historian, who seeks to know the author and his times through the literary work, and the historical interpreter of literature, who uses knowledge of biography and history to assist his understanding. He has little to say about the perceptiveness which is the object, if not always the result, of the close reading which the New Critics emphasize.

Neither Mr. Cunningham nor most other critics emphasize so much as they might the reliving, ideational and emotional, of the experience that the author put into the work. They will say it is assumed, must follow naturally if the reader understands. But does it—always?

THE INCREASING BAD HEALTH OF both the theater and the movies in this country has recently induced several interesting analyses of the patient's symptoms and disease.

In the September *Harper's*, John Houseman in "No Business like the Show Business" points out that today in three major cities there are less than half the number of theatrical productions that there were in 1928 and less than two-thirds the number that there were in 1912. The competition of radio, television, and the movies, skyrocketing production costs, the problems of housing and maintenance, have all contributed to the theater's present unhappy state. Houseman gives facts, figures, and charts to prove it. For him the only hope for the patient to live comes from the cheerful and industrious fanning of its spark of life by the little community and college theaters which in recent years have thrived and multiplied.

"Are the Foreign Films Better?" by Gilbert Seldes appears in the September *Atlantic Monthly*. From it we learn with some surprise that the "average Hollywood picture is not drawing sufficient audiences to pay its way." Moreover, Hollywood producers are rubbing eyes made dizzy by the sight of long queue lines for pictures which, according to Hollywood, should never have been successful—highbrow pictures, pictures with tragic endings, pictures like *Henry V*, *The Red Shoes*, *Open City*. These are no better than what Hollywood could do, thinks Seldes, but they are, for the most part, much better than what Hollywood does, because the major studios have too long been committed to the manufacture of average pictures for average runs. Now that the mass audiences are failing to support mass movies sufficiently, the industry may yet find its salvation in discovering that the critics who first announced that movies are an art are right and that respect for one's art is the highroad to success.

Another article which documents Seldes' view is that by James Agee in *Life* (September 5) entitled "Comedy's Greatest Era." He discusses how and why screen comedy during the last fifteen years has steadily deteriorated. The great screen comedians, he contends, were those of the silent movies—Mack Sennett, the father of American screen comedy; Charles Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and the late Harry Langdon. Today there are few comedians below middle age and "none who seem to learn much from picture to picture or to try anything new." He then goes on to discuss what constitutes humor and the means by which the actor can portray it. Agee concludes that "the only thing wrong with screen comedy today is that it takes place on a screen which talks. Because it talks, the only comedians who ever mastered the screen cannot work, for they cannot combine their comic style with talk. Because there is a screen, talking comedians are trapped into a continual exhibition of their inadequacy as screen comedians on a surface

as big as the side of a barn." He sees little hope that screen comedy will get much better without new gifted screen comedians who really belong in the movies and who have freedom to work out their experiments.

THE NCTE COMMITTEE ON INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION will present in *College English* brief jottings about books, magazine articles, and pamphlets that in the judgment of the committee will be of value to all teachers interested in furthering better human relations—and that is surely every teacher of English. Since the world sorely needs better human relations in general, not just in intercultural and interracial areas, these notes will not be held to the narrower confines indicated by the present name of the committee nor will they concern new publications alone.

The committee would like this task to be a co-operative enterprise, not one of committee members only. Send your ideas to Dr. George Robert Carlsen, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado, or to E. Louise Noyes, Santa Barbara High School, Santa Barbara, California.

For beginning teachers or those whose interest in the field is new Dr. Kilpatrick's recent number of the "Freedom Pamphlet" series,¹ *Modern Education and Better Human Relations*, has much to give. His discussion of concomitant learning and of the goals needed in teaching better human relations is both brief and pointed.

Beatrice Griffith's *American Me*,² a book about the problems of the young Americans of Mexican ancestry in Los Angeles, is outstanding in two respects. It is the work of a young woman who has had to outgrow her own background of prejudice before she could write with the understanding that she now shows. Each chapter of real-life narrative is followed by one of sociological interpretation. By this technique the reader,

after suffering with these young people, is led to think carefully about the implications in each story. Read it yourself for sympathetic insight into the lives of one group of underprivileged young people; share it with any of your students whose horizons of understanding need to be widened.

Another book good for sharpening sympathies is Perry Burgess' *Who Walk Alone*.³ Give this one to students who are inclined to grouse because they cannot have everything they want. The brave struggle of Ned Langford, an American soldier-patient in the leprosarium at Culion in the Philippines, and his determination to build a life in spite of his tragedy are a shot in the arm against self-pity.

If you are interested in human relations as shown in poetry, pick up the volume, *The Poetry of the Negro, 1746-1949*,⁴ edited by Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps. Here you will find poetry that stands on its own merits. You will find many that are already widely known and loved; you will find others that will bring to you all the thrill of discovery. You will find much of value for your classroom, whether you are teaching American literature or poetry or human relationships.

Two very usable short stories have appeared this summer. Laurene Chambers Chinn has in *Collier's* for August 13 a short short about a Chinese mother and her American-born high-school daughter. It is titled "Spelling Bee" and is well worth looking up in case you missed it. Incidentally, it would make a wonderful radio script for your high-school program. The other story, "Night of Trial," in the *Saturday Evening Post* for August 6, concerns an old Mexican sheepherder, his dog, and a mite of a young Scottish-American schoolteacher, Ellen McRae, and the way in which the three of them win some real victories over prejudice. You will like it; so will your students.

¹ Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, 327 South La Salle Street, Chicago.

² New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.

³ New York: Henry Holt & Co.

⁴ New York: Doubleday & Co.

New Books

A THESAURUS ON A NEW PLAN

From the time of the Webster-Worcester controversy to that of the Sage of Baltimore, the American public has been word conscious. As a result of this susceptibility, there has been no end to the making of word-books, good, bad, and mediocre; "look it up in this" has become a stock phrase in the market place as well as in the classroom. These postwar days have been particularly lush ones for publishers of such works as the recent deluge—ably reviewed in this journal by Professor J. B. McMillan (January, 1949)—testifies. To this list may be added another: *Laird's Promptory* (L. *promptarium*, L. L. *promptorium*, Professor Harold Whitehall, *promptory*).¹

The dust-jacket blurb asserts that *Laird's Promptory* has "completely fulfilled the need for a modern reference work to meet the demands of modern usage" for radio announcers, business persons, editors, crossword puzzlers, salesmen, anagram fans, readers, and writers. "There are," it continues, "12,930 separate entries, each of which lists all possible synonyms and antonyms, all related words and phrases, and specific equivalents."

Once more the fact is demonstrated that the sales promoters make claims that the editor or compiler must wince at. Only the commonest words are included among the main entries; esoteric and heavily Latinized words are specifically excluded. In the Preface, Professor Laird says: "Since we have built this book not to catalogue synonyms but to aid expression, we have assumed the responsibility of finding other ways of expressing an idea." The "other ways" are what he calls "specific equivalents" and

"synomic alternatives"; thus he avoids the linguistically thorny problem of synonyms and antonyms. He adds: "Our criterion for including words has not been, 'Would these words be synonyms if there were such things as synonyms?' Rather it has been, 'What is the word or phrase that the user wants when he looks up this entry?' Therefore the designation *synonym* as used herein should be thought of as a relatively loose and practical term." Ay, there's the rub.

This user, desiring a "synomic alternative" for the Anglo-Saxon word "spate," which he is conscious of employing too frequently, looked for that word. Too esoteric? It was not listed. I then looked under "flood" [a great flow of water] and found "deluge" and twelve other terms including "hightide," "flood tide," and "eagre" but no "spate." Why the British colloquial "eagre" is less esoteric than the British "spate" is yet a mystery. Nor could it be found under the cross-reference words "storm" and "water." Next I looked for "blurb," a common and a respectable word. It was not listed as a main entry, although it can be found, as *slang*, under "advertisement." Remembering the "old gag" (I tried to find a synomic alternative) about the student who wrote "the sunlight pilfered through the leaves," I looked up "steal." The idea of steal as a form of quiet motion was not included, unless by some stretch of imagination "carry away," "spirit away," or "run off with" should be so interpreted. The word "pilfer" is not listed among the 12,930 main entries.

On the assumption that "when one thinks of a word he does not want [like 'gag,' for instance?], the word is likely to be a common word, whereas the word he does want may be a less-known but more precise word," Professor Laird has "tried to include all common words as entries, and . . . [has]

¹ Charlton Laird, *Laird's Promptory: A Dictionary of Synonyms and Antonyms and Specific Equivalents*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1948. Pp. 957. \$4.95.

not hesitated to use slang and colloquialisms in the same way [as main entries] because we surmise that words like *swell* and *okay* rise readily in American minds." Again, suit-ing the action to the assumption, I looked for "O.K." and "okay." Neither form was listed. I turned to "all right"—not listed; to "correct," but "okay" was not a specific equivalent! Finally, I looked under "endorse" and there it was—spelled "O.K." It was also listed under "approve" and "ap-proval." Then I looked up "swell," a main entry bearing the usage level, *colloquial*. That is queer, I thought, until I recalled that the prefatory definition of *colloquial* was "a word restricted to a geographical area or to a class in society," and *slang* was an expression that "has never attained the dignity of careful use." Pursuing these dis-tinctions in the *Promptory*, I found that "gripe" as a verb [to disturb] was *colloquial*, but "gripe" [to complain] was *slang*. "Gripe" as a noun was not listed. What does one do when he has a "gripe to unload"? Grouped loosely as *slang* under "deception" [the practice of deceiving] were "bamboozlement," "funny business," "hokum," "skull-duggery," and "blarney." Checking against recent dictionaries, I concluded that the terms "slang" and "colloquial" were arbi-trarily applied as well as inaccurately de-fined.

The point of these illustrations is that the volume is neither so sound linguistically nor so usable for the man in the street as it could be. Unquestionably, a more modern book than Crabb's *English Synonyms* and a less complex book than Roget's *Thesaurus*, Laird's *Promptory* may "help the user to speak and write," but it does not help him enough.

MENTOR L. WILLIAMS

ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Report of the Conference on College Freshman Courses in Composition and Communication.

This *Report*, consisting of papers read at the conference in Chicago in April, 1949, is

well worth the attention of those who teach or administer college freshman courses in composition and communication. The fifteen papers which constitute the *Report* deal with the topics discussed at six sessions of the conference: (1) "Concepts Basic to Fresh-men Courses in Composition and Communi-cation" (two papers), (2) "Curriculum: Four Theories of Course Organization" (four pa-pers), (3) "The Needs and Possibilities for Research" (one paper), (4) "Integrating High School and College Work" (two pa-pers), (5) "Instructional Methods" (three pa-pers), (6) "Obtaining, Training, and Keeping a Competent Staff" (three papers).

One of the values of the *Report* is that it offers material for a general view of current ideas and practices in freshman composi-tion and communication courses. It seems that there are at present roughly four schools of thought: (1) those who place chief emphasis on grammar, "correctness," rhet-oric, logic, and style analysis; (2) those who follow many of the practices of the first school but also stress the "communication" approach; (3) those who make "communi-cation" the central idea and give to conven-tional English subject matter a secondary stress; and (4) those who make "semantics" the center of the course. The first six papers in the *Report* are interesting partly because they present the different points of view and because they sometimes show how the sub-ject matter of the course is modified to suit the different aims.

Another value of the *Report* is that it deals with many common problems and frequently supplies helpful answers. Those who are concerned with integrating high-school and college work will find the two papers on that topic of considerable interest, particularly A. K. Stevens' report of the Michigan proj ect, which gives a detailed account of care-fully planned co-operation between high-school and college teachers. Carrie Stanley of the State University of Iowa treats of "Motivating the Lowest Fifth" in a way that makes the task of teaching weak stu-dents seem much more stimulating and re-warding than it is generally thought to be.

Paul B. Diederich recounts his experiences and deals with possibilities of research relating to courses in composition and communication. His paper will be of interest to those in charge of freshman courses. Also of interest to heads of courses and to staff members are three papers on "Obtaining, Training, and Keeping a Competent Staff," especially the paper by Carlton F. Wells, in which he gives a very specific and detailed account of the procedure followed at the University of Michigan for the training and evaluating of freshman English teachers.

The problem of the ultimate aim of communication is considered at some length by Richard M. Weaver, James M. McCrimmon, and S. I. Hayakawa. Though Mr. Hayakawa entitled his paper "Semantics: An Ethical Basis for Communications Courses," it is not necessary to be a semanti-

cist to accept Mr. Hayakawa's conclusion that "the end of communication . . . is the organization of human cooperation." More open to controversy is his discussion of the audience at which freshman themes should be aimed. The perennial question of how, and how much, grammar should be taught is considered in some detail by Robert C. Pooley and is touched on briefly in several other papers.

On the whole, the papers given at the Chicago conference are informative and stimulating. College teachers of English may never agree on aims and methods in freshman courses, but they can gain a great deal from the sharing of ideas and experiences.

NEWMAN B. BIRK

TUFTS COLLEGE

Recordings

Twentieth Century Poetry in English: Contemporary Recordings of the Poets Reading Their Own Poems Selected and Arranged by the Consultants in Poetry in English at the Library of Congress and Issued under a Grant from the Bollingen Foundation. Album I by Katherine Garrison Chapin, Mark Van Doren, Wystan Hugh Auden, Richard Eberhart, Louise Bogan; Album II by Paul Engle, Marianne Moore, Allen Tate, John Gould Fletcher, John Malcolm Brinnin. Library of Congress Recording Laboratory, Washington 25, D.C., 1949. \$8.25 per album, plus packing and postage charges.

One reward of listening to the verse readings in Albums I and II of the Library of Congress series may well be that of detecting, more readily than by silent perusal, the precariousness of traditionally asserted differences in literature. Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" and Fletcher's "Clipper Ships" are, offhand, a sample of complete contrast: the former tensely disciplined and difficult, read by its author with a crispness almost suggesting contempt and yet produc-

ing deep excitement; the latter enthusiastically lush with romantic nostalgia and cast into a notably loose form marked by the interspersion of old-time chanteys. These the author sings boldly with a purposeful hint of shore hangover and, let us add admiringly, in the right key. Yet both these poems, each concerned in its distinctive way with vanished heroism, achieve a result possible only to art—that of insisting on the transience of human pretensions while, simultaneously and paradoxically, winning for them an emotional extension in time. Thus, especially in the recitation, the contrast in method tends to disappear in a common effect. Any teacher may find virtually indispensable a mechanical aid that sharpens so significant a lesson.

Perhaps it is but another of nature's unkind strokes that, in general, women read less impressively than men. This is not to belittle, I hope, the wonderful humility of Marianne Moore, which pervades her wistful rendering of "Spenser's Ireland" and helps to offset the difficulty caused by imprecise enunciations; nor the clear, intelli-

gent interpretations offered by Louise Bogan and Katherine Garrison Chapin.

Since this reviewer is a native of Illinois, he may humbly urge that middle western speech need not be so flat as the topography. Mark Van Doren's moving "Return to Ritual" merits more expression than he gives it, though certainly he speaks understandably and forthrightly. A similar observation applies with slightly less force to those other midlanders, Eberhart and Engle; at the same time it may be hoped that the recordings will bring new readers to these highly competent and strongly native artists. Brinnin is likely to win many listeners by the eloquence and acuteness of his verse and by the vigor and subtlety with which he reads it. Auden's presence reminds us pleasantly that we now have a certain

claim on him as an American. Between midwestern flatness and Oxonian restraint there is not, perhaps, a world of difference after all, though one discerns that the latter seems more useful as a tonal background for giving impressiveness to slight variations, as in "Alonso to Ferdinand" and "Musée des Beaux Arts," which Auden reads finely. Oxford did not prepare him, however, to produce anything but a genteel fiasco in his interpretation of the peculiarly American rhythms of "Refugee Blues."

With these excellent recordings at hand, the teacher can count it as good news that further albums, beyond the five now available, are in preparation.

ROBERT HUME

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA

Fiction and Poetry

The Egyptian. By MIKA WALTARI. Putnam. \$3.75.

The author is perhaps the most renowned writer in Finland. Set in Egypt, about 1000 B.C., the tale covers the history of all the then known world. The story has an astonishing sweep, is a panorama of religious and political strife, murder, intrigue, and passion. It is told by Sinuke, physician to Pharaoh and an adopted son of a physician to the poor of Thebes. "I came drifting down the Nile in little reed boat daubed with pitch." The physician's wife found him and called him her own. Already very popular in Europe. September Book-of-the-Month Club selection. Pp. 503.

The Lily and the Leopards. By ALICE HARWOOD. Bobbs-Merrill. \$3.50.

The familiar story of Lady Jane Grey is given new dignity and told with great compassion. There are many characters—Henry and his queens; all the Tudors, Greys, and Plantagenets; and many other important men and women. Against a richly colored background are familiar tragedies and character interpretations.

Silverlock. By JOHN MYERS MYERS. Dutton. \$3.00.

A native of Chicago takes a trip through the never-never land—"the Commonwealth"—visits hell, fights legendary monsters, etc. Fairy tale, legend, history, literary extravaganza, and a test of your own familiarity with literature. Cabellistic in style and theme; you like it or you don't, but you feel the author had a peck of fun with it.

Loving. By HENRY GREEN. Viking. \$3.00.

Seven novels by Henry Green have been published in England, where he is highly praised by leading critics. This novel is about the lives and loves of the servants in the castle of a rich woman in Ireland during the recent world war. Indirectly, of course, it discloses the life upstairs. The prose style is unique and partly off-focus. It is poetic, and the dialogues are quaint, with a strange charm. The appeal to readers is largely its unusualness. The characters live. The opening sentence is "Once upon a day"; the closing, "They were married and lived happily ever after"!

Especially Father. By GLADYS TABER. Macrae-Smith. \$3.00.

To the author, Father was a wonderful man. Reading about him is sheer fun and exasperation. Living with him must have been worse.

The River Line. By CHARLES MORGAN. Macmillan. \$2.75.

By the author of *Sparkenbroke*. After the war Sturgess, American college teacher, went to England to visit two married friends, an Englishman and a French girl whom he had known in the Underground in France. In the minds of all three is the tragedy of another man's death and an acute, unshared sense of their guilt and responsibility. Pervading the story is a study of the violence suffered by too many people in these tragic times. Pp. 195.

West of the Hill. By GLADYS HASTY CARROLL. Macmillan. \$3.00.

This story of Maine people two generations ago, shortly after the Civil War, will remind readers of the author's *As the Earth Turns*: "Love is of God, and every one that loveth knoweth God." On this text the simple community builds for the future and lives the present.

Pemberley Shades. By D. A. BONAVIA HUNT. Dutton. \$3.00.

A frankly daring imitation and continuation of *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth and Darcy gather about them at Pemberley many of the characters from *Pride and Prejudice*, but there are new characters, including a nobleman's natural son, about whom the story revolves. It is a Jane Austen story told as she would tell it. Amusing.

Live with Lightning. By MITCHELL WILSON. Little, Brown.

The background of the novel is authentic; its young author has decided to devote his talents to writing of technology and technologists. At the beginning of the story, ambitious young Eric Gorin, Columbia University physicist, is faced with the problem that confronts most young men: Must he compromise in business and politics if he is to win for himself material success, the woman he loves, and children? What price integrity!

A Rage To Live. By JOHN O'HARA. Random. \$3.75.

A social study of a Pennsylvania town. It is, of course, fiction and might be any American town. We see the leading family and Grace Caldwell, the daughter, who certainly has the rage to live and to live in defiance of public morals. Her childhood, triumphs, marriage, extra-marital affairs, and old age are skilfully interwoven with the pageant of town characters and others. It is a convincing, pessimistic picture of a small city and its people. Not for the conservative—to put it mildly.

Best Detective Stories of the Year. By DAVID C. COOKE. 1499 ed. \$3.50.

Twelve fast-moving, well-plotted thrillers. Variety.

Coast Calendar. By ROBERT P. TRISTRAM COFFIN. With decorations by the author. Bobbs-Merrill. \$3.75.

"My book," says the poet, "is the story of the work and play, human nature and weather, the fauna and flora, the ups and downs in a sample all-round Maine family." A guidebook, sketchbook, and a story of rich living written in charming prose. About 10" x 12". Good paper and print. A thing of beauty and variety.

Democracy in Jonesville: A Study in Quality and Inequality. By W. LLOYD WARNER and ASSOCIATES. Harper. \$4.50.

"Describing the rising tide of class distinction." A disheartening study of a typical American city and its social system in and out of schools, on Main Street and the wrong side of the tracks, in church and factory, on the farm. A sociological study of importance.

The Mature Mind. By H. A. OVERSTREET. Norton. Pp. 295. \$2.95

Are the tensions and confusions of our day largely due to the prevailing immaturity among adults? Reading Overstreet's interpretation of the theories of modern psychology may at least make us conscious of immaturity in others and should be a guide to self-help. Of particular interest are chapters on "Psychological Foundations," "What We Read, See, and Hear," "The Home as a Place for Growing," "Education: A Question Mark," "What We Ourselves Can Do." August Book-of-the-Month selection.

The Golden Apples. By EUDORA WELTY. Harcourt. \$3.00.

Seven short stories by the inimitable writer of prose. The characters live in Morgana, Mississippi (fictitious). Seeing with compassion and insight, Miss Welty endows them with qualities of folklore. Clever conversations. Exquisite time-settings.

Rest and Be Thankful. By HELEN MACINNES. Little, Brown. \$3.00.

Place: Wyoming hills; time: 1848. Two literary women, seeing their native land after years abroad, enchanted by scenic grandeur and ranch life, conceive the idea of sharing its peace and beauty. They invite a group of assorted writers and critics to the ranch for rest and inspiration. Interesting situations develop, while reactions are varied. Colorful, well done. September Literary Guild selection.

Fraternity Village. By BEN AMES WILLIAMS. Houghton. \$3.00.

Readers may remember some of these stories published in the *Saturday Evening Post* and the *Country Gentleman*. Time: 1919-41. Fraternity Village (Maine) does not change. Will Bissell's general store is still the meeting place for the characters who swap homely gossip and old and new experiences involving guns, dogs, fish—and people.

The Death of Captain Nemo. By ROBERT HILLYER. Knopf. \$2.75.

Captain Nemo (Jules Verne), his submarine yacht, and his oceanic grotto figure in a new light. Two war-weary American sailors come to the grotto on the eve of Captain Nemo's death. During their three days with the dying captain they read excerpts from his diary, which fill the body of the poem.

Dialogue with an Angel. By SISTER MARY JEREMY. Devin-Adair. \$2.00.

Thomas Merton, author of *Seven Storey Mountain*, says, "This volume of verse is, I think one of the best that has come from the pen of any Catholic poet in America. Sensitive, individual, and strong."

Explorer of the Human Brain. The Life of Santiago Ramon y Cajal. By DOROTHY F. CANNON. Schuman. \$4.00.

A biography rich in human interest and spiritual implications of Spain's most distinguished scientist, who in his boyhood was a torment to parents and teachers.

Pennsylvania: Songs and Legends. Edited by GEORGE KORSON. University of Pennsylvania Press. Pp. 466. \$5.00.

Folklore brought to Pennsylvania by settlers predominantly English, German, and Scotch-Irish has been preserved and handed down to descendants with an ever growing repertory of superstitions, legends, tall tales, ballads, etc. Well organized "planned and carried through with the functional view of folklore in mind." Thirteen folklore authorities contribute. Good paper and print.

Nonfiction

Lead, Kindly Light. By VINCENT SHEEAN. Random. \$3.75.

As foreign correspondent, Mr. Sheean saw the most important engagements of World War II. He had for years been a student of Eastern philosophy and had discussed with Gandhi his personal beliefs. He was present—almost within touching distance—when Gandhi was assassinated. He has written a sympathetic explanation of Gandhi's teachings, with chapters on Hindu philosophy, his own talks with Gandhi, the assassination and funeral, and his deep spiritual reaction when death came to Gandhi. The important fact about the book is Mr. Sheean's expressed deep belief in Gandhi's teachings. Midsummer Book-of-the-Month choice.

Elmtown's Youth. By A. B. HOLLINGSHEAD. Wiley. \$5.00.

The impact of social classes on adolescents. A study made in middle western communities under the auspices of the Committee on Human Development of the University of Chicago by an associate professor of sociology at Yale University.

This analysis of the social system of a midwest town of about 10,000 people deals with 735 adolescent boys and girls. Many case histories are given. "The social behavior of adolescents appears to be related functionally to the positions their families occupy in the social structure of the community." "Class system" has an ugly sound, but it can have even uglier results. What are we the people and the schools going to do about it?

The Shores of Darkness. By DEMETRIOS CAPETANAKIS. Devin-Adair. Pp. 183. \$2.75.

A collection of critical essays and poetry by a young Greek poet discovered by John Lehmann and Edith Sitwell. The volume includes a few translations from other Greek authors, a biographical study, and an essay by Edith Sitwell. The poet died at thirty-two.

The Devil in Massachusetts: A Modern Inquiry into the Salem Witch Trials. By MARION L. STARKEY. Knopf. \$3.50.

An excellent account of the Salem witchcraft trials. Thoroughly documented, with careful research. A psychological study of mass hysteria and its cause and beginning. Implications of the lesson to later generations. Quite readable.

A Little Treasury of American Prose. Edited by GEORGE MAYBERRY. ("Little Treasury Series.") Scribner. Pp. 954. \$5.00.

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The Populace in Shakespeare. By BRENTS STIRLING. Columbia University Press. Pp. 203. \$3.00.

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A Glossary of the New Criticism. By WILLIAM ELTON. Reprint from *Poetry* (232 East Erie Street, Chicago 11). Pp. 48. \$1.00; ten or more at \$0.50.

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Schools Are What We Make Them: A Handbook for Citizens. Bell & Howell (7100 McCormick Road, Chicago 45).

Prepared in collaboration with the Research Division of the N.E.A. The open letter on the back cover is by Paul A. Wagner, who has just resigned as educational director of Bell and Howell to become the youngest college president in the United States—at Rollins College. Mr. Wagner was once an NCTE employee.

On Getting into College: A Study of Discrimination in College Admission. American Council on Education. Pp. 99. \$1.00.

The study was designed and conducted by Julian L. Woodward, of the Elmo Roper organization, for a committee appointed by the American Council and subsidized by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith. It is not confined to racial and religious discrimination. A description of this study also appears in the April *Newsletter* of the Council on Cooperation in Teacher Education and is summarized in the *Education Digest* for September.

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